The Satanic Epic

Neil Forsyth

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NEIL FORSYTH

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PREFACE

> The death of Satan was a tragedy
> For the imagination
> —WALLACE STEVENS, "Esthétique du mal"

"Evil" has been much on the lips of politicians recently, and some have talked of the Devil as its representative. This kind of discourse has a long history and is common in times of crisis, like the present, or the early Christian Era, or indeed the years of the English Revolution through which Milton lived. I have described some of the reasons for this apocalyptic attitude to politics in my earlier book, *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth*. I also showed how much it has to do with the very invention of Satan. This new book extends that argument, and shows how Milton made use of the Satanic tradition. It may be an additional bonus of this study to discover how Milton anticipated, and even shaped, the combat discourse of our current leaders with their talk of "darkness visible" and "all hell broke loose," or indeed "the sound of public scorn." Had they read *Paradise Lost*, these leaders might be neither so strident, nor so confident of success.

Some chapters of this book, or parts of them, have been published as articles, but I always intended that they would join together in this book. I wanted to apply to Milton some of the research I had done for *The Old Enemy*. This new book must stand on its own, but there are surely more references to my previous work than a proper dose of scholarly modesty should permit. In the first chapter I have tried to explain the important findings of the earlier book and to establish the connections with *Paradise Lost* that emerge more fully in subsequent chapters. But this book is not a sequel: it is about Milton, not, as was *The Old Enemy*, about the Devil.

In one respect, though, the present book follows the earlier model. It is written with that quixotic idea of an interested, but nonexpert, reader in mind. To that end, I have tried to make it fully readable beyond the flourishing and privileged republic of professional Miltonists. What, I have asked myself, would that ideal reader need to know? The answer was usually that, though I should not underestimate what he or she might have read, I should provide too much, rather than too little, help. Reading Milton can be a thorough and robust education in much of what constitutes Western civilization. One of the functions of the footnote is to point towards that education. Like Aristotle I assume that most people take pleasure in learning.

For permission to rework earlier essays, I am grateful to the publishers of *Comparative Literature*, *Etudes de Lettres*, *The International Journal for the Classical*

Tradition, *Milton Quarterly*, and *SPELL*. A version of chapter 4 was first published in a Festschrift for Jeffrey Burton Russell, and I have to thank Brill of Leiden for permission to revise it. Chapter 7 appeared in its earliest form in *Milton in Italy* (Binghamton: Medieval & Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1991).

Except where indicated, all citations (and italicization therein) are from Roy Flannagan's recent old-spelling *The Riverside Milton* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), hereafter RM. Regular reference is also made to the editions of Alastair Fowler and John Carey (London: Longman, 1971 [2d eds. 1997, 1998]), Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: Odyssey Press, 1957), and John Leonard (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998). These editions are referred to simply by their editor's name and often with that useful Latin abbreviation, *ad loc.* I have also used *The Prose of John Milton*, ed. J. Max Patrick (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1967), hereafter PM, which has unfortunately been allowed to go out of print. But most references to the prose are to the Yale edition (YP), sometimes supplemented by the Columbia (CM) when the Latin is at issue.

It is one of the pleasures of attaching oneself to Milton that one finds one shares the passion with remarkable critics of many persuasions. John Leonard and Michael Lieb will, I hope, recognize how grateful I am for their enormously helpful and detailed commentaries on the whole manuscript. For critical and engaged reading of parts of this book at various stages, I am grateful to Gordon Campbell, Roy Flannagan, Wolfgang Haase, Ute Heidmann, Martine Hennard-Dutheil, W. Ralph Johnson, Jonathan Munk, Eric Parks, Al Shoaf, and Richard Waswo. None of these good people should be held responsible for the errors and infelicities that remain.

THE SATANIC EPIC

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INTRODUCTION

> Nothing can exceed the energy and magnificence of the character of Satan in "Paradise Lost." It is a mistake to suppose that he could ever have been intended for the popular personification of evil.
>
> —SHELLEY, *The Defence of Poetry*

1. *"Too full of the Devill"*

Paradise Lost is not an orthodox poem and it needs to be rescued from its orthodox critics. This book contends that the best way back to the poem Milton composed, rather than the one the orthodox would have us read, is to reassert the importance of Satan, heretic and hater. I shall be doing this in various ways. One is through revising the history of the Satan that Milton reimagines for us, since a mistaken idea about it has been widely accepted in recent years. It is the combat myth, I argue, that has always been at the center of that history, and Milton knew it. His more perceptive readers have kept it there, for the opposition is central to the poem. "The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels and God, and at liberty when of Devils and Hell, is because he was a true poet and of the Devils party without knowing it."[1] Blake's aphorism has become so famous that it is hard to hear what it says. I think that, like much Romantic criticism, it is right, or at least helpful, except for the implied accusation of ignorance. Milton knew quite well what he was up to: even the fetters are deliberately donned. And there was a "Devils party."

He claimed to be writing to justify the ways of God to men. Nonetheless, "Milton is a poet too full of the Devill," said an early reader, the country minister John Beale. Though he thought *Paradise Lost* "excellent," he found "great faults" in it, and preferred the earlier poetry, less obviously political: he wrote that Milton had "put such long & horrible Blasphemyes in the Mouth of Satan, as no man that feares God can endure to Read it, or without a poysonous Impression."[2] That view of Milton's Satan was prophetic, as well as perceptive, and it has continued in several forms to this day: contemporary teachers apparently feel the need to protest at the prominence given to Satan in student responses to the poem, or among certain benighted scholars. One such teacher, writing recently on an electronic discussion list, was proud to

[1] *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, pl. 5, in David V. Erdman, ed., *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (New York: Doubleday, 2d ed. 1988), p. 35. Further discussed below, chap. 1.16. Blake's text reads "Devils" with no apostrophe, allowing the word to be either singular or plural.

[2] Nicholas von Maltzahn, "Laureate, Republican, Calvinist: an Early Response to *Paradise Lost* (1667)," *Milton Studies* 29 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993), pp. 181–98.

announce that her students had "seen through Satan" very quickly. I do not think she was aware of the double meaning of the phrase.

In spite of such attitudes, Satan has stayed at the forefront of readers' reactions to the poem. Beale's more famous contemporary, John Dryden, described Satan as the poem's "hero, instead of Adam." Although Dryden was using the word hero more in a formal than a political sense, the remark was quickly read as a Tory slur against "that Grand Whig Milton."[3] The post-Restoration world continued to read Milton's politics through Satan's. A discussion in the *London Chronicle* of 1763–64 pitted Whig against Tory readings of *Paradise Lost* and in each case Satan stands for the unacceptable voice of the opposition: Tories thought Milton had repudiated the good old cause by "giving the same characteristics to the apostate angels as were applicable to his rebel brethren," while the Whig response sees Satan as the arch-Tory, "setting himself up over his peers."[4]

Romantic admiration for Milton built on this eighteenth-century reception, but now comparison with Satan was the way to admire one's heroes, not diminish one's enemies. Burns, even before the French Revolution, wrote of "my favourite hero, Milton's Satan," and talked of his "dauntless magnanimity; the intrepid, unyielding independance; the desperate daring, and noble defiance of hardship, in that great Personage, Satan."[5] William Godwin asked in his *Political Justice* of 1793, "Why did Satan rebel against his maker? It was, as he himself informs us, because he saw no sufficient reason for that extreme inequality of rank and power which the creator assumed."[6] Godwin's daughter, Mary, and her husband Percy Shelley, kept up the admiration long after the Revolution had turned sour. Mary's journal testifies to their frequent reading of Milton together, and she permeated her novel *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* (1817) with references to *Paradise Lost*. The eighteenth century had already shifted the focus of interest from Adam and Eve to the Satanic sublime, and *Frankenstein* reflects that shift. "Remember that I am thy creature," says the nameless monster to his creator: "I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. Everywhere I see bliss from which I alone am irrevocably excluded."[7] Percy Shelley, in an essay "On the Devil, and Devils," wrote

[3] John M. Steadman, "The Idea of Satan as the Hero of *Paradise Lost*," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 120 (1976):253–94; Nicholas von Maltzahn, "Milton's Readers," in *The Cambridge Companion to Milton* 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 243, 246.

[4] Quoted by Jackie DiSalvo in *War of Titans*: *Blake's Critique of Milton and the Politics of Religion* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983), pp. 29–36.

[5] Letter to W. Nicol, June 1787, in *The Letters of Robert Burns*, ed. G. Ross Roy, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp.121–23.

[6] William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, ed. I. Kramnick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 309. See Roger Sharrock, "Godwin on Milton's Satan," *Notes and Queries*, n. s. 9 (1962):463–65.

[7] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (New York and London: Norton, 1996), p. 66.

> As to the Devil, he owes everything to Milton. Dante and Tasso present us with a very gross idea of him: Milton divested him of a sting, hoofs, and horns; clothes him with the sublime grandeur of a graceful but tremendous spirit.[8]

This Satan was a Romantic hero, politically admirable—and good to look at.

Most readers have continued to connect Milton with his hero. But the differences just sketched have remained active, and no consensus has ever emerged about what the connection implied. Even the Romantic enthusiasts, as we shall see later, were not always so sure of their allegiance.[9] Are we to identify with Satan, who himself presents the case against tyranny but who takes on a tyrant's role, or read against his impact? Or both?

A modern critic attributes this uncertainty to the idea that Milton deliberately wrote a controversial poem, one that would continue to disturb its readers and perhaps excite commitment.

> Custom, tradition, indeed all the common glosses of theologians, are, for Milton, enemies of truth, whereas constant labor, tireless seeking, and continual interrogation are, again for Milton, a means of moving beyond the unthinking distortions of orthodoxy into the realm of truth.[10]

This view has little in common with the Shelleys', beyond the refusal to admit an orthodox Milton. Otherwise "constant labor, tireless seeking," and other American values have replaced the heroic Satan and his sublime grandeur. This newer Milton is a reflective heretic, who "thus gives voice to inconsistencies and to contradictions within his culture that often he cannot transcend," and that are frequently embodied in, or articulated by, his Satan. So, whether we read Milton for his sublimity or his controversies, we are drawn to the figure who dominates the poem. That, in a nutshell, is what this book is about—the attraction of Satan.

The appeal of Satan is hardly a new topic in the world of Milton studies. I

[8] Joseph Wittreich, ed., *The Romantics on Milton* (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve Press, 1970), p. 535.

[9] Lucy Newlyn, Paradise Lost *and the Romantic Reader* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 91–118, shows how complex was the Romantic use of Satan, even in a political context.

[10] Joseph Wittreich, "Milton's transgressive maneuvers: receptions (then and now) and the sexual politics of *Paradise Lost*," in Stephen Dobranski and John Rumrich, eds., *Milton and Heresy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 246. This collection sets out to save Milton from those who align him with orthodoxy—an absurdity, as the editors write, for someone who rejected the Trinity, denied creation *ex nihilo*, insisted on the materiality and mortality of the soul, "opposed infant baptism, scorned paid clergy, renounced state interference in religious affairs, defended divorce, and approved of polygamy" (p. 1). The orthodox are perhaps best represented by the authors of *Bright Essence: Studies in Milton's Theology* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1971), William B. Hunter, Jr., C. A. Patrides, and J. H. Adamson. The main argument of that book, however, was well answered by Michael Bauman, *Milton's Arianism* (Frankfurt am Main and Bern: Peter Lang, 1987).

will argue nonetheless that Satan's importance, his overwhelming power in the poem, and even that attractiveness itself, have been obscured by most recent criticism. It may seem unthinkable to those beyond the groves of academe, but there has been a conscious attempt by orthodox, pro-God critics (whether actively Christian or not) to deflate Satan's wonderfully persuasive rhetoric and show forth his moral flaws. At the same time there has been what looks like a largely unconscious drive to protect vulnerable young readers, and perhaps the critic himself, from the Satanic power. The mistaken assumption here is usually that Satan is to be equated with "evil," and the result has been to ignore what seem to me obvious features of the poem. Thus Satan's ambivalent and constantly shifting relationship to the poem's narrator has been buried beneath the insistence that the narrator must somehow always be the mouthpiece for a stern and moralizing Milton. And in the same way, any apparent opposition between the narrator and Satan has been read as a "correction" of Satan, or the reader. If Satan is "Vaunting aloud, but rackt with deep despare" (1.126), as the narrator early insists, that is universally taken as a sign that we must withdraw any nascent sympathy for the Devil. I will argue instead that this assumption violates something more important—the tragic status of the hero, what the Shelleys took so seriously.

It also devalues the larger shape of the poem. *Paradise Lost* is a long poem, as epics are, and its more important meanings emerge gradually. So the order of chapters in this book, after the first, is governed very roughly by the structure of *Paradise Lost*, since I try to respect—and account for—the reading experience Milton designs for us. (Chapter nine, for example, is largely about Book 9.) The sequence of chapters also represents an accumulating argument about the reasons for calling the poem "the Satanic epic," obvious enough in the early books, where Satan dominates, but more complex later when he is often absent from the action. The last chapters show how the structure of the whole poem, and even its final scene, may be read as Satanic.

Romantic admiration, then, was not misplaced. Satan's appeal is obvious from the beginning. Milton constructs him as our point of access, a seductive way in, both to the action of the whole epic and to the world of Paradise itself. He gets our (my) sympathy in many ways: he knows, or rather he discovers during one marvellous speech, that he is damned, like a good tragic hero; but he also seems mysteriously to know, as we all do, that "terrour be in Love / And beautie" (9.490–91). And if this be the Miltonic narrator's idea as much as Satan's, as it certainly is when he acknowledges "jealousie / . . . the injur'd Lovers Hell" (5.449–50), this only shows how entangled is the narrator with his hero, and how alike they are. The poem is pervaded by Satan, as the title of this book is designed to indicate.

The controversy over Satan, instigated by the earliest readers and unforgettably extended by the Romantics, is where most readers start to get interested. One of the great pleasures of reading Milton, and reading about him, is the

strength and eloquence of the passions he arouses—and the passions usually begin with Satan. In recent years, two other issues have dominated the debate: Milton's politics, especially his role in the English revolution and the ways in which his poetry can be read in the light of that role, and Milton's women. Under the impact of materialist criticism, and feminist theory, most of the best writing, whether pro– or anti-Milton, has been about those matters. I shall not be ignoring those important topics in this book, but I think the time has come to reopen the issues from the point of view of the main character in *Paradise Lost*. That is, after all, how Milton presents them; politics and the relation of men to women (also a political issue) are both approached initially through the figure of Satan.

It is strange that some parts of the text, so blatantly subversive, were not censored by Restoration officialdom. No doubt Milton was careful, as those who write under autocratic regimes have to be. But we are told that the censor almost destroyed the poem because of the Satanic simile about the eclipse that "with fear of change / Perplexes Monarchs" (1.598–99). And if the censor thought those lines were questionable, then why did he not, even more insistently, scratch out other bits? What of Belial, for example? In the rabbinic view, his name means "profligacy," and is a casual curse in Hebrew, ("worthless"). Surely any reader would recognize that what is said of him applies more obviously to the Royalists, the cavaliers of Milton's own immediate experience, those aristocratic enemies against whom he and his fellows had tried and failed to establish a free commonwealth. The tense is now the present:

> In Courts and Palaces he also reigns
> And in luxurious Cities, where the noyse
> Of riot ascends above thir loftiest Towrs,
> And injury and outrage: And when Night
> Darkens the Streets, then wander forth the Sons
> Of *Belial*, flown with insolence and wine.
> Witness the streets of *Sodom*, and that night
> In *Gibeah*, when the hospitable door
> Expos'd a Matron to avoid worse rape.
>
> (*Paradise Lost* [hereafter PL] 1.498–505)

That worse rape, if you look up the story of the visiting angels in Genesis 19.4–11 (and the parallel type-scene in Judges 19), you discover to be homosexual rape of one of those beautiful angels. With these implications it's perhaps not surprising that God cursed the biblical Sodom and Gomorrah. But it is surely surprising that this passage, in which Milton implicitly tars the court of Charles II with the same brush, somehow escaped the censor.[11] The passage about the "disastrous" eclipse comes only a few lines later.

[11] Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1977), p. 407, points

Partly because of the implied politics, Milton's Satan has proved to be one of the most fertile characters in English literature—fertile of interpretation, of response, of rewriting—and unsettling, even threatening, because so fascinating and yet so hard to evaluate. He has become, arguably, as subversive for subsequent readers of Milton as was the devil of the popular and theological tradition. Though the Romantic poets thought him the prototype of revolutionary heroism, most readers have felt compelled to demonstrate his flaws—as if the danger he represents needs constantly to be contained by every reader, at every reading. The poem, I think, encourages both these responses, in that it offers the reader an alluring portrait of Satan but sets it within an epic narrative structure that encourages constant questioning—and within which it gradually fades away as seasonal time and human history ("this transient World, the Race of time"; 12.554) replace or convert myth.

For the most part, my own arguments will explore other aspects of Satan than the Romantic hero. But this is the place to begin, where the poem (almost) begins. Without that sympathy for Satan that is our Romantic inheritance, we cannot properly read Milton. For some readers, this pressure of Satan in the poem is quite a simple matter: he is heroic early on, in public, but then his private self is revealed, perhaps already in the meeting with Sin and Death in Book 2, certainly in the Niphates speech that opens the action in Book 4,[12] and thereafter he quickly ceases to trouble the critic, who nonetheless expends a great deal of energy putting him in his place and assuring us he is embodied evil. For others, though, the problems posed by Satan are not so easily dispelled: we have no magic wand like Ithuriel's spear in 4.810–19 to make the fiend start up in his own shape.[13] Indeed, since he is both angel and serpent, not to mention cormorant and toad, does Satan have anything as ordinary as "his own shape"? What, after all, does that odd phrase "own likeness" mean?

The likeness of Satan, in one sense, is the poem itself. Dennis Burden argued in his book, *The Logical Epic*, that inside the godly or Adamic narrative that Milton wrote there was a parallel Satanic epic trying to get out. Satan's is

---

out that the phrase "Sons of Belial" was frequently used during the civil war to describe Cavaliers—by Stephen Marshall, John Goodwin, and others. The enemies of the Puritans were said to include "lewd persons and all sons of Belial" by William Ames, while Joseph Mede had called the Senior Fellow of Milton's Cambridge College, Christ's, "a son of Belial." Milton himself used the phrase in 1642 about a drunkard and swearer, and in 1643 about "the draffe of men" who misuse liberty as license (YP 1.893, 2.225).

[12] C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942), p. 97. A deteriorating Satan is also argued in Barbara Lewalski, Paradise Lost" *and the Rhetoric of Literary Forms* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 55–78, and Gale H. Carrithers, Jr., and James D. Hardy, Jr., *Milton and the Hermeneutic Journey* (Baton Rouge: Lousiana State University Press, 1994), pp. 74–79.

[13] John Guillory, *Poetic Authority: Spenser, Milton, and Literary History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), pp. 146–71, explores this image.

a classical epic of heroic virtue and tragic fate, of the kind conceived in Hell when the devils sing "Thir own Heroic deeds and hapless fall / By doom of battel" (2.549–50). Burden contrasts this with the Christian epic of freedom and just law, in which "doom" means simply the decree of God: "In the day we eate / Of this fair Fruit, our doom is, we shall die" (9.762–63). He shows how closely the two epics are juxtaposed, for example, in Book 9, when Satan, following Genesis 3.5, appeals to Eve's desire to be like a goddess, to make the heroic attempt to rise above her lot, and ignore the point of her act in the Christian epic—simple disobedience. In Book 10, similarly, the Satanic triumph that turns bliss to a hiss is framed by the Adamic recovery from Satanic despair.[14]

But I shall be arguing that there is a more even congruence of Satan with the full text of the poem. Satan seduces the reader in several ways: first he has an interior, a private self, recognizably close to ours, and it is here rather than in a literal Hell that he is so intelligently, self-consciously damned—he has that hollow depth that texts seem to share with people; and second, well, he is a good speaker, both in the public scenes of the early and middle books, and in the more intimate dialogue of Book 9. The text invites the reader to experience that seduction, at times in company with Eve (who falls), most often in company with the narrator (who resists). In spite of the narrator, at times even because of him, Satan's presence as the dominating character makes the text itself, at most of the key moments, inveigling, unreliable, seductive, fascinating. The Satanic epic continues even when he is not himself present: in the conversation about astronomy and love that Adam has with Raphael in Book 8, supposedly an innocent calm before the fall, the narrative does not allow us to forget for long our postlapsarian complicity with Satan. And even after he drops ignominously out of the poem in Book 10 with that splendid and extended hiss, the seductive text keeps him active.

One part of his appeal is more elementary. Take even his most manifestly wicked moments, such as his appeal to "necessitie, / The Tyrants plea." By this phrase the narrator means his colonialist resistance to the "harmless innocence" of Adam and Eve in the name of that "public reason just, / . . . [which] compels me now / To do what else though damnd I should abhorre" (4.388–92). At a moment like that, he makes us angry enough to want to intervene in the text (as Milton himself wishes he could do at 4.1–8: "O For that warning voice . . . "), reclaiming it from Satan, like children at a pantomime who are encouraged to boo the villain and warn the heroine, "Look behind you!"

[14] Dennis Burden, *The Logical Epic* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), pp. 57–75, 141–44. See also Richard Corum, "In White Ink: *Paradise Lost* and Milton's Idea of Women," in Julia Walker, ed., *Milton and the Idea of Woman* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p. 142, on the two texts, one of "obedient submission," the other of "subversive mutiny."

2. *"God is not the devil"*

We meet Satan first. He is, to say the least, interesting. Then we meet the enemy, God. The contrast is deliberate. His first words are a question addressed to his Son to which he obviously knows the answer, and they include a sly pun on the word "transports" about Satan's journey (3.81); indeed his position in the poem makes him seem always to be reacting to Satan. Even when he appears to take the initiative, to "beget" the Son, it is only to anticipate Satan's reaction. Theologically that may not be true, but it is what the structure of the narrative demonstrates. Theoretically the Christian God may be "Omnipotent, / Immutable, Immortal, Infinite" (3.372–73), and omniscient to boot, but what the poem highlights is the combat myth that informs the New Testament, and where the opponents are a bit more evenly matched. Behind the attractiveness of Milton's Satan, as most unprejudiced readers usually soon notice, is the problem of God. Indeed that is what the poem proposes to solve, to "justifie the wayes of God to men" (1.26).

In his theological treatise, *De doctrina Christiana*, Milton shows himself aware of the potential problems in his representation of God. He adopts extreme or minority positions in his efforts to assert the supremacy and holiness of God. His anti-Trinitarianism, for example, like his Arminianism, both derive from his insistence on the omnipotence and benevolence of God. He cites a key passage from Isaiah 45.6–7 in both connections: "I am the Lord, there is no other; I make the light, I create darkness, making peace and creating evil (Hebrew *ra*)." In discussing the creation, he quotes it (without the last verse) as evidence for his insistence on the supremacy of God, and then explains it in a way that supports his opposition to the idea of the Trinity, and to the suggestion that any power could equal God's, or that there could be any other God:

> If such things as common sense and accepted idiom exist at all, then these words preclude the possibility, not only of there being any other God, but also of there being any person, of any kind, equal to him. (YP 6.300)

And in his chapter on God's Providence, the same Isaiah passage reappears, though this time, since it imputes the creation of evil to God (the Latin Tremellius-Junius Bible Milton was using reads "facientem pacem et creantem malum"),[15] the passage requires a different exegesis to fit the new context of Milton's argument:

[15] CM 15.66. On Milton's concern with God and evil, see chap. 6, below. In his *Commonplace Book*, he poses the question and admits the answer is unsatisfactory: "Why does God permit evil? That the account of Reason with Virtue may be correct. For virtue is attested by evil, is illuminated and trained. As Lactantius says: that Reason and Judgment may have a field in which they may exercise themselves by choosing the things that are good and shunning the things that are evil; although even these things are not satisfactory" (YP 18:128–29). The idea of evil as a test of virtue is taken up again, but without the crucial concession, in both *Areopagitica* (YP 2:527–28) and in the important chapter on God's Providence (8) in the *De doctrina Christiana*. For a measured

> Isa. xlv.7: *Making peace and creating evil*—that is, what afterwards became and is now evil, for whatever God created was originally good, as he himself testifies, Gen. i.[16]

There is no ground whatever in the Hebrew or the Latin for Milton's interpretation: he merely needs to defend God's benevolence at the same time as he asserts his governance of all things, evil as well as good.

The key to that defence is the experience of freedom, which Milton argues for throughout his prose as God's great gift. He often prefers heresy to orthodoxy, he says, and opens the treatise with an epistle that makes an impassioned defense of his freedom to find his own doctrine in the Bible (YP 6.123). This argument leads him to denounce the Calvinist views he had previously held (without admitting his own complicity), since denial of man's freedom was tantamount to making God the cause of evil.

> It is sufficiently clear that neither God's decree nor his foreknowledge can shackle free causes with any kind of necessity. There are some people, however, who, struggling to oppose this doctrine through thick and thin, do not hesitate to assert that God is himself the cause and author of sin. . . . If I should attempt to refute them, it would be like inventing a long argument to prove that God is not the devil. (YP 6.166).

Witty or casual as that may sound, it is in fact deadly serious: it is what the poem sets out to do. Milton knew God may seem very like the Devil—and the poem shows how much.

Near the beginning of the chapter on God in *De doctrina Christiana* (YP 6.131), Milton actually says that "either God or some supreme evil power of unknown name presides over the affairs of men. But it is intolerable and incredible that evil should be stronger than good and should prove the supreme power. Therefore God exists." This feeble argument stops there and does not go on to consider the possibility the poem seems to open up—that this God who exists is the same as that "evil power of unknown name." Milton knew, nonetheless, from his reading of Irenaeus or Epiphanius that such had been a widespread belief among those early Christians known as Gnostics. He also knew the Manichaeans had subscribed to the belief that the world was divided between good and evil powers, since Augustine, whom he follows closely at times, had been a Manichaean hearer for nine years.

It is all the more surprising, then, that Milton deliberately gives his best

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discussion, see Dennis Danielson, "The Fall and Milton's Theodicy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*, ed. Dennis Danielson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999), pp. 144–59. On the recent dispute over Milton's authorship of *De doctrina Christiana*, see the special issue of *Milton Quarterly* 31, no. 3, (October 1997).

[16] YP 6.330. Milton cites the passage twice on this page. This occasioned a most unusual lapse by the excellent editor, Maurice Kelley, who in his note says he cannot find the other place where Milton uses the same explanation of Isaiah 45.7, but there it is, a few lines above his note.

poetry to Satan, on whose side the language of classical epic turns out in strength. The similes have always been justly admired. Consider, for example, the extraordinarily condensed language for his spear "to equal which the tallest Pine / Hewn on *Norwegian* hills, to be the Mast / Of some great Ammiral, were but a wand" (1.292–94). The detail of the simile brings us into Britain's troubled maritime present only for the final words to reject the comparison as wholly inadequate for the size of this particular spear—but which then is only a walking stick "to support uneasie steps / Over the burning Marle." Size, as we shall see, is never a sure measure of Satan. (And it may not matter that Latin for "mast" is *malus*.) Or Satan is likened to the sun seen through mist, or in eclipse (2.594–99), or he is a vulture flying in sheer menace across the barren plains against a snowy ridge (3.431–39). In the garden itself similes often become magic shapeshifting: as he approaches Adam and Eve,

> A Lion now he stalkes with fierie glare,
> Then as a Tyger, who by chance hath spi'd
> In some Purlieu two gentle Fawnes at play,
> Strait couches close, then rising changes oft
> His couchant watch, as one who chose his ground
> Whence rushing he might surest seize them both
> Grip't in each paw.
>
> (PL 4.402–08)

Blake may have found an original for his own Tyger there, but what is striking is the way the final phrase suddenly brings the menace of Satan's physical proximity into sharp focus. There is nothing for God like all these dynamic images.

Neither is there anything for God to match the memorable lines of classical myth that limn the portrait of Satan and his followers or that underline the parallels with the Miltonic narrator: the Mulciber artist of 1.738–46, the Proserpine story of 4.268–72, or the Bellerophon reminder at 7.17–20. (In each of these cases, Milton underlines the similarity with his own narrative only to deny it: that may be what makes them all so captivating.) As Pope saw, Milton's God, by contrast, is "a school-divine" (by which he meant scholastic philosopher as well as pedagogue).[17] Apart from his objectionable puns ("Man shall not quite be lost, but sav'd who will, / Yet not of will in him, but grace in me" [3.173–74 is another]), and in spite of the ambrosial fragrance that keeps being released in Heaven like a deodorant, God's language is plain to the point of unpleasantness. He pretends, for example, not to be omnipotent: the Son congratulates him on this joke without laughing (his face remains "se-

[17] Pope, *Imitations of Horace's Epistles* (1737): "In Quibbles, Angel and Archangel join, / And God the Father turns a School-divine" (2.1.101–2). See also John Shawcross, ed., *Milton: the Critical Heritage 1702–1801* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1970), p. 371, for Cowper's reaction to Pope's rudeness.

rene," 5.733–42), but Satan, as William Empson saw, is actually hoodwinked into the rebellion on the same assumption. God also tells Michael to drive out the rebels, knowing he cannot perform the command (6.52, 702–3) and taking care to give him only half the team (6.49; 2.692): he has always reserved the real glory for his Son.[18]

Shelley was responding to this problematic God figure, as well as making his case for atheism, when he wrote that "to have alleged no superiority of moral virtue in his God over his Devil . . . was the most decisive proof of Milton's genius." Much of what Milton gives his God is biblical, but he makes it harder to swallow through parallels with Satan. God is vengeful (3.199), and Adam knows it when that way inclined himself (10.1023–36), whereas Satan learns to see through it: "Revenge, at first though sweet, / Bitter ere long back on it self recoiles" (9.171–72). Satan may be the great hater, but God can match him: the Son tells him "whom thou hat'st, I hate, and can put on / Thy terrors, as I put thy mildness on, / Image of thee in all things" (6.734–36). Christ is merely quoting Psalm 139.21–22, "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? . . . I hate them with perfect hatred."[19] God's wrath is famous, "infinite" according to Gabriel (4.916), and Raphael tells his innocent audience, in a very odd passage, that if God had been interrupted while he was creating the world, he might well have smashed it down: all this is curious in a poem that claims to have left behind "the wrauth / Of stern *Achilles*" and other epic heroes (9.14–15). Indeed God sees rage in Satan even when he is as far from it as possible, arriving on a "calmer wave" (2.1042) and stooping "with wearied wings, and willing feet / On the bare outside of this World" (3.73–81).

Milton was explicit about this God in *De doctrina Christiana*, where he wrote:

> We ought not to imagine that God would have said anything to be written about himself unless he intended that it should be a part of our conception of him. On the question of what is or what is not suitable for God, let us ask for no more dependable authority than God himself. *If Jehovah repented that he created man*, Gen vi 6, *and repented because of their groanings*, Judges ii 18, let us believe that he did repent. . . . If he *grieved in his heart*, Gen vi 6, and if similarly *his soul was grieved*, Judges x 16, let us

[18] William Empson, *Milton's God* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961 [rev. ed. 1965]), p. 47. John Carey, *Milton* (New York: Arco Press, 1970), pp. 77–83, has a persuasive and witty summary of these attributes of God. For the relation of God to Satan, see William Flesch, "The Majesty of Darkness," in Harold Bloom, ed., *Milton* (New York: Chelsea House, 1986), pp. 293–311. In order to salvage God, Flesch argues that Milton's God is not God. Empson, I hope, is grinning in his grave. See chap. 1.17 below, for more on Empson.

[19] Michael Lieb, "'Hate in Heaven': Milton and the *Odium Dei*," *ELH* 53 (1986):519–39; see chap. 6. Milton quotes the same Psalm at *De doctrina Christiana* 2.11 (YP 6.743), "There is some hatred . . . which is a religious duty, as when we hate the enemies of God or of the church."

> believe that he did feel grief. . . . If it is said that God, after working for six days, *rested and was refreshed*, Exod xxxi 17, and if he *feared his enemy's displeasure*, Deut xxxii 27, let us believe that it is not beneath God to feel what grief he does feel, to be refreshed by what refreshes him, and to fear what he does fear. For however you may try to tone down these and similar texts about God by an elaborate show of interpretive glosses, it comes to the same thing in the end.[20]

For John Carey, this is "shattering frankness."[21] It is certainly the refreshing honesty with which Empson thought, rightly to judge from these extracts, Milton had written the part of God in the poem—to show "that God is not the devil."

A comparison may help put Milton's God in perspective. Here, for example, is the God that Harold Bloom finds in "J," or "The Yahwist," the brilliant but anonymous poet responsible (according to 150 years of Biblical scholarship) for the most resonant parts of Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers:

> J's Yahweh is human—all too human: he eats and drinks, frequently loses his temper, delights in his own mischief, is jealous and vindictive, proclaims his justness while constantly playing favorites, and developes a considerable case of neurotic anxiety when he allows himself to transfer his blessing from an elite to the entire Israelite host. By the time he leads that crazed and suffering rabblement through the Sinai wilderness, he has become so insane and dangerous, to himself and to others, that the J writer deserves to be called the most blasphemous of all authors ever.[22]

We should allow here for Bloom's need to exaggerate, and the biblical God is a composite who derives from other, less blasphemous sources, as well. But still it is clearly a more rational variant ("Dye hee or Justice must"; 3.210) of this megalomaniac whom Milton conjures up (and also, mirabile dictu, sets out to "justify"). God's sudden decision to exalt his Son, the event that causes all the trouble, is thus what readers of the Book (the Bible) have come to expect, but is in itself merely arbitrary. Satan may well get some of our sympathy.

3. *The Narrative Theology of "therefore"*

The heroic Satan of the Romantics is one of many roles that Satan adopts in the course of the poem. Like those great Shakespearean villains, Richard III or Iago, from whom he learned a lot, he is, or becomes, a fine actor, and knows how to play to his audience. But the heroic role has a more fundamental justification than any offered by the Romantics, though dimly sensed, I am

[20] *De doctrina Christiana*, (YP 6.134–35). Carey, *Milton*, cites these lines in the Columbia translation, since he had not yet produced the version which is now the Yale volume.

[21] Carey, *Milton*, p. 83.

[22] Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon* (London: Macmillan, 1995), p. 5.

sure, by those fine readers. It follows quite simply from the logic of the narrative, the myth of origins as Milton constructs it. No one seems explicitly to have recognized this essential and informing aspect of Satan's role—he is ignorant of it himself. It is nonetheless clear that his sacrifice leads not to the damnation but the salvation of mankind. And I do not mean simply the theory, well argued by humanist critics, that the complexities of our freedom and happiness make the Fall fortunate, but rather that, according to God's logic, Satan is actually necessary for salvation. To be sure this is rather a buried than an evident truth, since the surface glory must all go to Satan's bitter rival, the Son. As is often the case in reading Milton, we can get at this justification by exploring one key word, and what critics have made of it. The operative phrase is God's: "Man **therefore** shall find grace, / The other none" (3.131–32; emphasis mine).

The word "therefore" has a normal, obvious use in English, making a logical link between a proposition or argument and the conclusion that follows from it. For Stanley Fish, however, whose work has defined the direction of critical thinking about Milton for the past 30 years or so, the word here is deliberately misleading, inviting the reader to commit another of our regular mistakes. It doesn't really mean "therefore" at all.[23] In one of the least convincing parts of his remarkable book, Fish needs to argue against the obvious meaning of the word in order to undermine the advanced and sympathetic position that Milton seems to accord Satan. That is part of the Fish method, presenting the apparent meaning of a phrase as delusionary and then spending several clearly argued pages showing why the words cannot mean what they purport to mean.

The case of this particular "therefore," though, is tricky for him, since it is a part of God's talk, and Fish has been arguing for some time that God's speech, when properly attended to, is clarity itself. It is fairly obvious that Fish is uncomfortable with his argument, since he relegates the whole discourse to a footnote. Let us first see why the question matters.

At issue here is the role that Milton gives to Satan as equivalent or narrative double of the Son. The whole sorry story begins, in Milton's version, from the rivalry that God wittingly instals between them by promoting the Son above Satan in the angelic hierarchy. They are mirrors for each other throughout the early and middle books of the poem. Both, for example, are saviours of mankind. The Son offers himself with fairly elaborate fanfare as the one to suffer life and death in order to make up for man's polluting sin, but God also makes Satan play a similar role, and in the same theological Book 3. After a long and persuasive account of why he made mankind free (though no one has challenged him on that score), God explains, in a few well-chosen words, that he

[23] Stanley Fish, *Surprised By Sin* (London: Macmillan, [1967] 1997), p. 215. See especially chaps. 1.16, and 2.5, below, for further discussion of Fish.

will damn Satan and his angels to eternal torment, but that mankind will find grace.

> The first sort by thir own suggestion fell,
> Self-tempted, self-deprav'd: Man falls deceiv'd
> By the other first: Man therefore shall find grace,
> The other none: in Mercy and Justice both,
> Through Heav'n and Earth, so shall my glorie excel,
> But Mercy first and last shall brightest shine.
>
> (PL 3.129–34)

Many commentators with a broad commitment to God's cause will have felt a certain relief that he adds that last line to close his speech, especially since the treatment of the angels who follow Satan is scarcely merciful. At 5.694–96 and 703–10, Raphael says that Beelzebub's "unwarie brest" was deceived by Satan, and the rest of the angels are logically entailed. There is a clear contradiction here: blindly following the leader does not make them "self-tempted." And it does not help that Milton's residual Calvinism makes him condemn the "farr greater part" (12.533) of mankind to the same fate. On the contrary, that is what makes the case of the fallen angels so desperately relevant. A lot hangs on God's "self-tempted, self-deprav'd."

Alastair Fowler manfully rescues God in his comment on this passage by arguing that Milton means "the angelic species fell by intramural temptation, from within their own kind, whereas the human species will fall by temptation from without, from the *other* (sort, species)." And he proposes that "*De doctrina* 1.9 shows that Milton held God's more disparaging account to be true" (i.e., that the angels were responsible for their own fate, not tempted by Satan), and concludes that "Raphael would naturally be partial to his own kind."[24] And indeed one has to choose between God or Raphael as unreliable commentator or narrator. It is true that in the treatise Milton says, "It appears that many of them revolted from God of their own accord [*sua sponte*] before the fall of man," and cites several texts, none of which actually say what he wishes them to say (including John 8.44, which is about the devil, not other angels).

The very absence of persuasive biblical evidence suggests that the other version, the one given by Raphael in 5, is the one that Milton would rather believe, if only his need to absolve God of the charge of arbitrariness had not proved stronger. And we may well ask what real difference it makes whether one is tempted "intramurally" or not. Thin grounds on which to base eternal damnation, we might conclude. The Abdiel episode gains greater and greater importance the more we contemplate what the poem would be like in its absence: not only would no one in the whole poem successfully resist tempta-

[24] Fowler modifies his language in the second edition (1998), suppressing the reference to *De doctrina Christiana*, but still insisting "one need not infer that God is harsh to the angels."

tion, and so dramatize some kind of Miltonic alternative to the inexorable march of the poem's plot, but the fallen angels would be eternally damned because they believed what their "great leader" told them, "faithfull how they stood" (1.611)—and they have even less reason than Eve to expect him to lie.

The fate of those unsuspecting legions of angels who follow Satan into the eternal pit ("Millions of spirits for his fault amerc't"; 1.609) has distracted most critics' attention from the other half of this doctrine. The angels are condemned because they fell "self-tempted, self-deprav'd," but mankind, who fell because tempted by an outside agent, will be saved. And the connection between the two halves of the doctrine is underlined by that beautifully logical "therefore." "Man therefore shall find grace, / The other none." The logic, then, is that those legions of troubled and sympathetic angels (they behave exactly like loyal and necessary troops in the kind of wartime that Milton and his contemporaries all knew too well) are condemned so that mankind may be saved. And the logic may be carried one step further: what saves mankind is the very existence of the Satan figure whose leadership damned the other angels.

Most critics ignore this issue. To his credit, Stanley Fish faces it, if only in a footnote. He argues, as usual, that the offending language is a temptation placed in the way of the reader. He is defending God's "faultless logic which *can* be understood if the reader is willing to make the effort."[25] The faultless logic this time has to do with the separation of God's foreknowledge from the fact of man's responsibility (in freedom) for the Fall, but Fish is honest enough to recognize, if only implicitly, that this logic also requires the damnation of Satan and his angels. Further, that damnation is the occasion for man's salvation, the literally crucial offer of Grace. How does he try to extricate himself, Milton, and God, all three of whom are generally assumed to be batting on the same side?

> The implication in the syntax is that grace is due man because his error is someone else's responsibility: man *therefore* shall find grace. But this is deliberate teasing, if not on God's part, then on Milton's. The "therefore" is not logical, but arbitrary; Satan's presence in the garden is not really an extenuating circumstance: God merely chooses to make it the basis of an action that proceeds solely from his good will. The urgings of the Devil may render obedience difficult (or perhaps make it easier) but never impossible. God points the moral beforehand, "Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall" (99), a line that will pursue us into Book IX. Man does ordain his own fall, and we always know it to be so, but a decoy like

[25] Fish, *Surprised*, p. 215. Diane McColley, *Milton's Eve* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983), p. 189, thinks God's words are "prophecy, not decree," while Keith W. F. Stavely attributes them to Milton's Arminianism, "Satan and Arminianism in *Paradise Lost*," *Milton Studies* 25 (1989):125–39.

> "therefore" is nevertheless able to make us go against our knowledge, for a moment; we want very much to read "deserve" instead of "find" grace, and do so until the word "mercy" reminds us that grace is gratuitous, cannot be earned and certainly not deserved: "But Mercy first and last shall brightest shine."[26]

It is always bracing to quote Fish. The move that separates syntax from logic is a common one, and one for which all readers of Milton do indeed need to watch out. But the problem here is elsewhere. Fish is so eager to push before us the issue of man's responsibility, which is the lesson his *Paradise Lost* is always teaching us in one way or another, that he doesn't realize that that is not the issue here. It is not the reason for the Fall that is at stake, but the reason for the Redemption. The logic of God's unavoidable "therefore" leads not from Satan's presence to the inevitability of the Fall—for Milton's God would never say any such thing, or dream it—but from Satan's presence to salvation. Thus in the certainly arbitrary logic of God's discourse, the fact of being tempted by "the other" warrants God's concluding words about his mercy.[27]

After the usual pause for ambrosial fragrance to fill all heaven, and after praise of the Son's face, which as Fowler observes rhymes with "Grace," the Son replies to this speech. In spite of the gas and grace everywhere, the Son feels the need to expand on God's brief mention of grace, in case we may not have picked up the full generosity of it.

> O Father, gracious was that word which clos'd
> Thy sovran sentence, that Man should find grace;
> For which both Heav'n and Earth shall high extoll
> Thy praises, with th' innumerable sound
> Of Hymns and sacred Songs, wherewith thy Throne
> Encompass'd shall resound thee ever blest.
> For should Man finally be lost, should Man
> Thy creature late so lov'd, thy youngest Son
> Fall circumvented thus by fraud, though joyned
> With his own folly?
>
> (PL 3.145–53)

The speech goes on a bit, but manages to suggest what the alternatives to the divine strategy might be, and thus why it is the best plan. He points out that otherwise "shall the Adversarie thus obtain / His end, and frustrate thine" (3.156–57), accomplish his revenge, and draw after him to Hell the whole of

[26] Fish, *Surprised*, p. 215.

[27] Thomas Corns, *Regaining*, p. 54, says perceptively that "The Father's differentiation in Book III between the treatment of humankind and the treatment of the fallen angels is abstract and schematic; the concluding books act out what it means experientially. . . . Adam and Eve and their offspring could all share Satan's fate; some, who pray and repent and persevere, will escape it. The tragedy of Satan makes that divine comedy seem the more remarkable and fortunate."

the human race (the speaker's younger brother, "thy youngest Son"). It may sound, then, as if Satan has God in a cleft stick, however the Son may palliate the logic. The alternative, and of course there is one, God being God, is to wipe out the whole Creation, and unmake, for him (i.e., for Satan) "what for thy glorie thou hast made" (3.164). And he wouldn't want to do that, of course. It would lead to serious questioning of God's goodness and greatness: they would be "blaspheam'd without defence" (3.166).

It is a little surprising that no one has really grasped the implications of this speech.[28] Looking forward to what the whole plot of the poem is going to unfold, the Son becomes a kind of spokesman for the Satanic future. Either the whole Creation comes to nought, which must be tempting to the God of Noah or the Apocalypses, or else God has to figure out a way to redeem mankind. The Son's logic is inexorable. Satan wins, unless mankind can be saved. And God can permit mankind to be saved because of Satan the tempter, who, by the same logic, is not saved.

There is the vital narrative logic that Fish misses by dismissing the "therefore." If we read it carefully we may see that the next and crucial step towards the Redemption, the Son's offer to sacrifice himself, indeed follows logically from the way God and Son describe the situation. Satan fell first. Mankind fell because tempted by him. To save mankind from damnation, another higher power must step in and save them. Satan's temptation of mankind is a necessary prerequisite to the Son's reciprocal intervention in the fate of mankind. Without Satan, no Son. This is Milton's narrative variant of a common saying: "No Devil, no God" was to be John Wesley's way of putting it. An earlier version is "If no devils, no God."[29] Or, to put it another way, the Devil keeps God good.

Thus Satan has an extremely important role to play in the philosophical or theological structure of *Paradise Lost*. It is Satan's presence that both causes and excuses the fall of mankind, and his role is to allow God to forgive Adam and Eve. Like his great opponent in the poem, the Son, he is, in an important sense, sacrificed for the good of mankind. Both Son and Satan are, in this version of the Christian myth, necessary for salvation. And while the one understands his role, and volunteers for it, knowing he will ultimately overcome death and ride in triumph high, the other steps unwittingly up to be damned.

[28] John S. Diekhoff, *Milton's Paradise Lost: A Commentary on the Argument* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1946), pp. 98–104, discusses the issue without noticing the problem. But see C. Q. Drummond, "An Anti-Miltonist Reprise, III: Satan or, God Damns His Angels," *The Compass* 4(1978):43–61, to which I was recently alerted by a piece of J. Allan Mitchell, "Reading God Reading 'Man'", *Milton Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (2001):72–86.

[29] See Maximilian Rudwin, *The Devil in Legend and Literature* (Chicago: Open Court, 1931 [1973]), p. 106; and *The Trial of Maist. Dowell* (1599; p. 8), cited in Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), p. 559.

4. *"The most heroic subject that ever was chosen"*

My book's title links Satan with "epic." A good deal of Satan's public character originates in epic poetry, and I shall be exploring some of the parallels. Homer, Vergil, Ovid, Lucan, Dante, Tasso, Ariosto, Spenser: long is the list of the predecessors Milton calls to book in what the Renaissance regarded as the supreme genre of literature. The list always ends with Milton. *Paradise Lost* is by common agreement the last great epic. No doubt it is many other genres as well, as Barbara Lewalski has shown.[30] Indeed, it is in some ways like an early novel: Milton's main human characters are not the bristling heroes of epic or even the romantic swashbucklers of the Arthurian epic he once planned to write, but the key subject of the bourgeois novel, a married couple.[31] Yet in so far as the interest of the poem lies in Satan, the models that Milton follows are epic: the genre he is always modifying as he writes is the one for which Homer remains the great exemplar in Western literature. Among other things, that means the poem is long. Some of its effects reveal themselves only as our reading unfurls. A good example is the scene we have just been considering, in which the Son steps forward as redeemer in response to God's logic.

This key scene is actually a twin, coupled with a parallel in the previous book. In the passage with which the great consult of Pandaemonium in Book 2 comes to a conclusion, Beelzebub calls for volunteers for a great voyage to discover an unknown world, and Satan offers himself. The passage is full of echoes both classical and biblical, but in its main outlines, and above all in its central character, Satan, it is Milton's invention. It is based on passages in Homer, but transformed in revealing ways.

Consider first what happens in *Iliad* 7. Worried at the dominance of the Trojans, Athene goes down to the battleground outside Troy and meets her rival Apollo "beside the oak tree." He accedes to her complaint and they agree to stop the general fighting by having Hector challenge the Greeks to single combat. The seer Helenos "gathered into his heart their deliberation" and subsequently carries the message to his brother Hector. Apollo and Athene then settle on "the great oak tree of their father Zeus of the aegis," in the shape of two vultures, to watch proceedings.

Hector issues his challenge, including much detail about what he will do with the body of the victim (return it to the Greek camp) and where he will place his armor as a trophy (Apollo's temple), and also what to do with his own, should he be killed. There is then a silence before anyone volunteers to oppose him:

[30] See Lewalski, *Rhetoric*.

[31] As we shall in chap. 9 below, they are also threatened with adultery, the key to the novel genre in Tony Tanner's *Adultery and the Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979). For further discussion of the epic and novel, see also chap. 2, n. 28, below.

> So he spoke, and all of them stayed stricken to silence
> in shame of refusing him, and in fear to take up his challenge.
> But now at long last Menelaos stood forth and addressed them
> in scorn and reproach.[32]

Here we get one of those rare moments when Homer seems to address a hero personally (usually Menelaos), saying "there, o Menelaos, would have shown forth the end of your life," except that his brother, Agamemnon, leader of the expedition, steps in: "Menelaos, beloved of God, you are mad." This man Hector is their best warrior, he explains, better than you are; why even Achilles is afraid of him. Menelaos obeys, and joyfully his henchmen take off "the armour from his shoulders." Nestor, the aged and talkative counsellor, now steps up and shames the Greeks again with talk of his own youth, the battles he has fought, and what he would not do if he were still in his youth. Whether from shame or boredom, the immediate result is that nine of the Greek heroes step forward, and finally Ajax (in the continuing absence of Achilles) is selected. He and Hector exchange challenges and do battle with spear and shield and large stones, and

> would have been stabbing with their swords at close quarters,
> had not the heralds, messengers of Zeus and of mortals,
> come up, one for the bronze-armoured Achaians, one for the Trojans,
> Idaios and Talthybios, both men of good counsel.
> They held their staves between the two men, and the herald Idaios
> out of his knowledge of prudent advices spoke a word to them:
> "Stop the fight, dear children, nor go on with this battle.
> To Zeus who gathers the clouds both of you are beloved,
> and both of you are fighters. This thing all of us know surely.
> Night darkens now. It is a good thing to give way to the night-time."
> (*Iliad* 7.273–82)

They both agree to stop fighting, and exchange "glorious presents" so that others may say, "These two fought each other in heart-consuming hate, then joined with each other in close friendship, before they were parted." The peculiar flavor of the *Iliad* is there, in that hard fight and the exchange of gifts (a sword with studs of silver, a purple war-belt).

Milton makes use of various bits of this scene. The vultures, only vaguely threatening in Homer (and not referred to again as the continuous present of Homeric narrative focuses on the men) reappear in the elaborate simile (3.430–39) for Satan when he first arrives in our world. He also settles as a bird on a sacred tree in Eden to survey the scene, in the shape of a cormorant (4.195–96). Even the duel interrupted by nightfall (though not the exchange

[32] *Iliad* 7.92–95, trans. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951).

of gifts) is echoed in the confrontation of Satan and Gabriel at the end of Book 4.

Yet how different is *Paradise Lost*! Instead of the bright clarity of the heroic epoch, where all the values, both of prowess and friendship, are tested and duly placed, we have a complex network of narratives with ambiguous meanings. Much of this is focused on Satan, but it is not only his character that makes the difference; it is the skein of parallels and contrasts that develop as the story winds on. Homer's is oral epic—or primary, as C. S. Lewis called it,[33] while Milton's is written, or secondary. The differences are vital to the way Milton works: the seductive involvement of the reader, the sudden, identifying shocks of recognition, the extended parallels of which we gradually become uncomfortably aware—these make Milton's form of the epic genre Satanic, and of this we shall see many examples as we proceed.[34] In the present case, on the primary level of the narrative, Satan is the strong, manipulative politician rescuing his new Parliament, or "Synod of Gods," from its irresolution by getting Beelzebub to make the announcement about the newly created earth and to call for volunteers to make the journey:

> But first whom shall we send
> In search of this new world, whom shall we find
> Sufficient? who shall tempt with wandring feet
> The dark unbottom'd infinite Abyss
> And through the palpable obscure find out
> His uncouth way? or spread his aerie flight
> Upborn with indefatigable wings
> Over the vast abrupt, ere he arrive
> The happy Ile.
>
> (PL 2.404–10)

There is no "palpable obscure" in Homer, no "Abyss." The latter is partly Hesiodic, but the contrast with Homer's language is mainly due to the Bible, to the Greek *abussos* of Revelation 20.3 translated as "bottomless pit" in the Authorized Version. "Palpable darkness" at 12.188 echoes this passage at the other end of the poem and both allude to the darkness of Exodus 10.21, "even darkness which may be felt." Jerome's Latin Bible, the Vulgate, has *palpari queant*, here, Tremellius-Junius (the Latin Bible Milton often used) *palpet*. And darkness echoes through the poem to remind us of Milton's decidedly un-Homeric blindness.

The major biblical intervention, though, is in the principal focus of the scene. In response to Beelzebub's challenge, like Homer's heroes Milton's angels look at each other in silent dismay:

[33] C. S. Lewis, *Preface*, pp. 12–60.
[34] See, for example, chap. 8, below.

but all sat mute,
Pondering the danger with deep thoughts; and each
In others count'nance read his own dismay
Astonisht: none among the choice and prime
Of those Heav'n-warring Champions could be found
So hardie as to proffer or accept
Alone the dreadful voyage; till at last
Satan, whom now transcendent glory rais'd
Above his fellows, with Monarchal pride
Conscious of highest worth, unmov'd thus spake.

(PL 2.420–29)

He now offers himself for the dangerous mission. The scene is thoroughly Homeric, except that, lurking in the reader's consciousness will be a parallel passage in the Bible, in Isaiah's vision: "Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? And said I, Here am I; send me" (Isaiah 6.8). Part of this verse is actually quoted by Jesus at Matthew 13.14–17 as evidence for his own mission. Indeed the Isaiah text had long been read as a type of Christ's prophetic ministry. So the dialogue of Hell echoes the mission of Christ. As often, Satan and Son, epic and theology, are brought into uneasy connection.

In Satan's acceptance speech, Milton reproduces more Homer, this time the famous sentiments of Sarpedon about the duties of kingship. Milton liked this passage: he also quotes it in his *First Defence* as part of the justification for removing Charles I.[35]

Glaukos, why is it you and I are honoured before all others
with pride of place, the choice meats and the filled wine cups
in Lykia, and all men look on us as if we were immortals,
and we are appointed a great piece of land by the banks of Xanthos,
good land, orchard and vineyard, and ploughland for the planting of wheat?
Therefore it is our duty in the forefront of the Lykians
to take our stand, and bear our part in the blazing of battle,
so that a man of the close-armoured Lykians may say of us:
"Indeed, these are no ignoble men who are lords of Lykia,
these kings of ours, who feed upon the fat sheep appointed
and drink the exquisite sweet wine, since indeed there is strength
of valour in them, since they fight in the forefront of the Lykians."

(*Iliad* 12.310–21)[36]

[35] CM 7.112.

[36] Of recent Milton commentators, only John Leonard refers to and quotes the Sarpedon speech. For more extensive discussion of these commentaries, see chap. 9 and the Conclusion, below.

Satan asks the same rhetorical questions:

> Wherefore do I assume
> These Royalties, and not refuse to Reign,
> Refusing to accept as great a share
> Of hazard as of honour, due alike
> To him who Reigns, and so much to him due
> Of hazard more, as he above the rest
> High honourd sits?
>
> (PL 2.450–56)

Sarpedon's sentiments, as G. K. Hunter well says, "are generally supported by the whole value system of the *Iliad*."[37] But Satan's impressive rhetoric is undercut by his blatant appeal to the rights of monarchy, fine for Homeric heroes but dubious for a revolutionary who had advocated beheading his king. Milton insists on this here, scattering words for king through the passage, and ending the scene with a royal gesture as Satan ("the monarch") stands up to prevent reply. And Satan's own words are, as often, ambiguous. Line 452, as Fowler points out ad loc is open to two contrary readings: "if I refuse," and "refusing as I do" to accept the hazard with the honor.

Beyond these local effects of adapting Homeric to Satanic epic via biblical and contemporary language, *Paradise Lost* works by means of extended and echoing pairs within its own world. So the Hell of Book 2 and the Heaven of Book 3 are brought into troubling parallel. And the curious thing about *Paradise Lost* is that we first meet this devilish version before we come to the heavenly. So it is not simply a parody: rather its effect may be to poison the heavenly version, when it comes. Satan's elaborately staged offer of himself for the heroic mission to colonize earth precedes the episode of the Son's solitary sacrifice. The link is made in several ways. The call for volunteers in Heaven ("Say Heav'nly Powers, where shall we find such love . . . ?"; 3.213–17) obviously echoes Beelzebub's call in Hell: both are followed by an embarrassing silence while it becomes clear no one else is ready for the task, and both offers, when they come, are greeted by a loud shout, in which there is surely some relief from the assembled angels. So in both scenes a heroic volunteer eventually presents himself for the task ahead, Satan to explore Chaos and find the newly created world of Paradise, and the Son to make up for man's expected failure by sacrificing himself to death:

> Behold mee then, mee for him, life for life
> I offer, on mee let thine anger fall;
> Account mee man; I for his sake will leave
> Thy bosom, and this glorie next to thee
> Freely put off, and for him lastly dye.
>
> (PL 3.236–40)

[37] G. K. Hunter, *Paradise Lost* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1980), p. 23.

Such contrasts are how the poem works in its longer epic structure. The language of Hell is duplicitous (the speech is Beelzebub's but the idea is Satan's, whereas God's idea is spoken by God), but it is also resourceful, elaborate, resonant, inventive ("wandring feet," "vast abrupt"): Heaven is by contrast rather flat, making simple statements without elaborate dressing ("thine anger," "this glorie"—not Satan's "transcendent glory"). Milton risks having his Heaven read like a parody of Hell, without the epic color.

Most readers find Book 3 dull compared with the excitements of Hell in the previous books, but we need to remember that we are being invited to measure on a different scale than excitement the various kinds of heroism in these opposed speeches. Satan is brave, but in whose cause? The Son is equally brave, but for others, not himself. Once he is in Eden, Satan admits to Gabriel that a reason for his mission was simply the desire to escape the pains of Hell:

> Lives there who loves his pain?
> Who would not, finding way, break loose from Hell,
> Though thither doomd?
>
> (PL 4.888–90)

And Gabriel wonders how it came that "not all Hell broke loose" with him, and asks ironically, exposing Satan's apparent duplicity:

> courageous Chief,
> The first in flight from pain, had'st thou alledg'd
> To thy deserted host this cause of flight,
> Thou surely hadst not come sole fugitive.
>
> (PL 4.920–23)

The Son's mission, by contrast, is towards the pain of his own death, as he knows. One might argue the Son is less brave than Satan, since he clearly thinks he can rely on God to save him from ultimate death. But given what we have seen, and will see, of Milton's God, we may think that that's not a very sure foundation on which to lay one's faith. What he certainly knows about God, for he says so, is his anger. And in view of what was just said about Satan's duplicity, what are we to make of a God who calls for volunteers, knowing all the while that his beloved Son is going to step forward? An omniscient God in a Homeric epic will, of course, regularly pose problems like this, but Milton seems especially to set things up so that we notice. And usually it is Satan who makes us notice, as he too is stretched between theology and epic.

ONE

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SATAN

> It may perhaps be expected of me in this history, that since I seem inclined to speak favourably of Satan, to do him justice, and to write his story impartially, I should take some pains to tell you what religion he is of; and even this part may not be so much a jest, as at first sight you may take it to be; for Satan has something of religion in him, I assure you.
>
> —DEFOE, *The Political History of the Devil*

In the middle books of *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve listen to the angel Raphael's story of the war between God's troops and the rebel angels. They are filled

> With admiration, and deep Muse to heare
> Of things so high and strange, things to thir thought
> So unimaginable as hate in Heav'n,
> And Warr so neer the Peace of God in bliss
> With such confusion.
>
> (PL 7.52–56)

The story is beyond them. That hate in Heaven is "unimaginable" points to the role of Milton's Satan and to the problem he poses his audience. Evil arises in bliss. The phrase "hate in Heav'n" contrasts two words that the alliteration requires us to breathe together. The task of Adam and Eve, at which they fail, and that of the poem's readers, who may not, is to grasp the implications of that paradox. Satan may help us imagine.

Though God is certainly no stranger to hate, the main hater in Milton is Satan. He is the mysterious source of enmity, even of war, within the world of heaven, and on Earth thereafter, the serpent within the Garden. In spite of all the orthodox efforts, and many unorthodox ones, to avoid this obvious truth, he comes with the package: he is there, as John's gospel says, "from the beginning," both in Christian tradition and in *Paradise Lost*. He is the answer to the question, "Who first seduc'd them to that foul revolt?" (1.33), which opens the narrative of the poem, though curiously he is "th' infernal serpent" in that answer and not named yet as Satan. In his relation to language more generally, Satan is the embodiment of antithesis or paradox raised to metaphysical proportions ("hate in Heav'n") and endowed with all the attributes of depth and complexity that make for interesting literary characters. A way to elude an insoluble mathematical conundrum—how do you get from one to two in the

number series? That is to say, whether you divide or multiply unity, one, you just get unity,[1]—he is also at times irresistibly attractive, as he was for the Romantic readers of Milton, and for many before and since. By exploring something of how he came to be, we shall begin to see why.

1. *The Old Enemy*

How then does Milton exploit the early development of the satan figure? One misleading idea about this matter is abroad among Miltonists, that the oddness and ambivalence of Satan derive from the fact of his several separate origins (as king of this world, angelic ruler of Hell, heroic warrior, and serpentine tempter), all brought uneasily together in one figure. Frank Kastor argued that he was essentially a tripartite figure in origin—tempter, ruler of Hell, warrior angel—and that these three roles are uneasily combined in *Paradise Lost*. John Carey accepted this view, in what is perhaps the finest single essay on Milton's Satan, written for the *Cambridge Companion*, and unfortunately he perpetuates it, without updating, in the new edition.[2] J. Martin Evans also made use of this theory in his Cambridge edition,[3] distinguishing Lucifer from Satan in ways that are not really justified by the tradition. Granted that the figure is a composite, historically speaking, and contains ingredients from diverse sources, there had long been agreement among religious authorities that one role above all characterized Satan: he was what his Hebrew name implies, the Adversary. This was the most general, and so the most inclusive, of his many names. And the reason for this inclusiveness, its centrality in the overall narrative of Christianity, is the apocalyptic movement, to which in its early years the Jesus sect (as Norman Cohn calls it) belonged.

The informing narrative of apocalypticism, I argued in *The Old Enemy*, is

[1] See *De doctrina Christiana*, 1.5.54, (YP 6.212): "The numerical significance of one and two must be unalterable and the same for God as for man." For more on this important doctrine, see below n. 51: it forms part of Milton's Arianism, on which see *Milton and Heresy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), ed. Stephen Dobranski and John Rumrich, pp. 75–92.

[2] John Carey, "Milton's Satan," in Dennis Danielson, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999 [1st ed. 1989]), p. 162. See Frank Kastor, *Milton and the Literary Satan* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1974), a development of his Berkeley thesis. The case is perhaps different with the visual images of the Devil, as Luther Link argues in *The Devil: The Archfiend in Art From the Sixth to the Sixteenth Century* (London: Reaktion, 1995). Comparing two images from the extraordinary *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berri*, Link says the monster exhaling fire in Hell has nothing in common with the beautiful Lucifer cast out of Heaven, because "these two images derive from distinct pictorial traditions that almost never overlapped and were never integrated. This suggests that the graphic attributes and concept of the Devil were rarely defined in the imaginations of artists. . . . the Devil, with a few exceptions (particularly in Romanesque sculpture of 1050–1130), was *not* imaginatively seen as a 'real, personal presence'", and this in spite of the insistence of theologians (pp. 15–16).

[3] J. Martin Evans, ed., *Paradise Lost: Books IX–X* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 16.

the combat myth.[4] It was mainly the ancient figure of the satan, the enemy, who gave Christianity (though not Judaism) that mythological cast that has been at issue in much twentieth-century theology.[5] And if it is Satan who most obviously shows Christianity as myth—not in any pejorative sense, but simply because myths are the kinds of stories in which we believe—then it is also Satan who makes the link to literature, since myths, from Aristotle to the present, have been seen as a category of literature. Myths are narratives, and Christianity, particularly when seen from the Satanic perspective, was seen to be narrative, too. Milton, I suggest, was a close and accurate reader of the Christian tradition when he put Satan and his war with Christ, an explicit version of the myth, so close to the structural center of his poem,[6] even though its audience, Adam and Eve, did not understand it. In a wider sense, the whole poem is informed by the meanings of the myth.

The first point to grasp, then, is that, even in the religious tradition, Satan is not simply the personification of evil (or its *incarnation*, to use a loaded term that Milton himself exploits). He was first, and really always remained, a character in a narrative—in fact in the myth of a combat between Christ and Satan that informs, or gives shape to, the Christian story of Fall and Redemption. The role of Satan in that narrative is to be the Opponent, the Adversary, the one who motivates the plot, who drives the story into motion. The idea that Christ, or God, is good and Satan evil, though very widespread, is not universal and is in any case secondary; it is an interpretation of the primary texts and traditions, which are narrative and may reverse (or simply ignore) good and evil markers.[7] Characters, by a good Aristotelian principle, are produced by the plot and function as the plot requires: evil comes later. Even in *Paradise Lost*, Satan is initially simply the Enemy, he who opposes and rebels against the

[4] The first half of the present chapter summarizes and extends some of the key arguments in *The Old Enemy: Satan and The Combat Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987). A useful summary will be found in the review by H. A. Kelly in "Satan the Old Enemy: A Cosmic J. Edgar Hoover," *Journal of American Folklore 103* (1990), pp. 78–84, with discussion in succeeding numbers of the journal.

[5] I was thinking especially of the "demythologizing" tradition initiated by the German theologian Rudolf Bultmann, an associate of Heidegger's, but also of a book that once disturbed the much quieter waters of English theology, *The Myth of God Incarnate*, ed. John Hick (London: SCM Press, 1977). I developed my view of Satan through analysis of ancient myths and of theology, which I put in parallel with each other.

[6] Stella Revard, *The War in Heaven* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), shows, however, that "Milton's substitution of the Son of God for Michael as victor in the heavenly combat is almost unique in hexaemeral literature" (p. 195). Clearly it was a conscious decision to write the story as the combat of Son and Satan, because that is how Milton read Christianity.

[7] In art, as Luther Link argues in *The Devil*, p. 130, the Devil does not embody evil, which is shown mostly through human figures. The reason is that in the Scholastic tradition, deriving from classical philosophy and Augustine, evil is simply an absence, the lack of good, when it is considered metaphysically—and it is hard to paint a nothing.

divine decree: he chooses evil later just to be different, since, or rather *if*, God is good:

> If then his Providence
> Out of our evil seek to bring forth good,
> Our labour must be to pervert that end,
> And out of good still to find means of evil.
>
> (PL 1.162–5)

So Satan is the opposite of God, as well as his opponent, and in this initial choice of his identity, he signals not a difference of essence so much as of structure and direction: from evil towards good, and therefore from good towards evil. Only later, when Satan has arrived on Earth and seen the newly created physical world, the sun included, does this initial choice of his become the famous and simplified cry, "Evil be thou my Good" (4.110). Those words suggest already a central difficulty of the interpretive tradition: good for what?; evil, but for whom? "Good" and "evil" pretend to be absolute terms, like Platonic ideas, aspiring to the status of nouns rather than adjectives, but in *Paradise Lost* it is Satan who first constitutes them as these absolutes, and we ought, perhaps, to be a little wary of taking Satan's word.

In fact, Satan explicitly rejects Michael's term "evil" for the War in Heaven, which "wee style / The strife of Glorie" (6.289–90). And at 9.465 he is struck "Stupidly good" by the sight of Eve, though in the same passage he is also, for the only time, called "the Evil one." It has been argued that the narrator sees good and evil as pre-existent absolutes, but that Satan takes a more Hobbesian view, in which the terms are defined by speaker and context.[8] In the above passages, however, Satan takes both sides: he appears to apostrophize "Evil" as an independent entity, but he also thinks he can choose it, perhaps even bring it into being.

The figure of Satan exists, then, not as embodied evil, but by virtue of his opposition to the hero of the myths, whether god or man, and the main story that came to be told in the mythological tradition of Christianity was the story of the origin of this enmity, often through the rebellion of a hitherto subordinate god or hero. Traces of this mythic paradigm and its several variants are to

[8] Stephen Fallon, *Milton Among the Philosophers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 219, compares Satan's phrase to the moral relativism of Hobbes: "these words of Good, Evill, and Contemptible, are ever used with relation to the person that useth them: There being nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any common Rule of Good and Evill, to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves." There was an admirable e-list discussion of this issue between John Leonard and Harold Skulsky, at <milton-l@richmond.edu, 8.5.1997>. The poem does not resolve the question, nor do I think Satan changes his mind, even in the Niphates soliloquy, and he does not recognize his own wickedness. Does Iago, even at the end? See also below, chap. 6.4 for the relation of Satan and "evil." Burden, *Logical Epic*, pp. 21–22, points out that both Hobbes and Hume were baffled by the distinction implied in the notion that God can allow evil but not cause it. See below, p. 175n.

be found in various places in the sacred literature of the Judeo-Christian tradition, which is usually called simply "the Bible" (from the Greek for "book"), but the myth is nowhere spelled out in full. To find what it said we need to turn to its sources: to those Canaanite predecessors, recently uncovered by archaeologists, where Lucifer begins as a bright young rebel; to the Greek myths, especially those told by Hesiod or Apollodorus or Ovid, about Zeus, Hephaestus, Prometheus, or Phaethon, even Icarus; and to the other religious myths recovered in great detail by wonderful accidents from the sands of Egypt, the Gnostic systems that are often so close to orthodox or canonical Christianity. The stories told in these disparate contexts differ widely, though they share common narrative structures, and none of them is really the origin of Satan: they simply provide ways for us to understand the context out of which the Satan figure developed. And since the story is nowhere told in extenso within the canon, any number of speculative versions was possible, and many of the main events were not fixed.

2. *Ancient Myth and Epic*

Among the more interesting or influential of these ancient combat myths are the Babylonian Gilgamesh versus Humbaba story (Huwawa in the Sumerian original), the Ninurta (later Marduk) versus Tiamat myth, the Zoroastrian Ahura Mazda (Light) versus Ahriman myth, and the Greek variant in which Zeus defeats Kronos, and then the Typhon monster, which Milton knew directly through Hesiod and other ancient sources like Apollodorus. Though we know about most of these ancient Near Eastern myths only through the remarkable work of archaeologists over the past 150 years, many traces of the Babylonian, and especially Canaanite, myths survive in the Old Testament, whether in the references to Leviathan (in Job 41.1 for example), to Yahweh's victories over Sea and River (common in the Psalms, e.g., 14.1–5, 77.6; cf. Hab. 3.8–15), or to the chaos of *tehōm* (Gen. 1.2, "the deep" of the King James Version, cognate with the Babylonian Tiamat) and Milton makes use of them. His catalogue of devils with their elaborate names and pedigrees, the important figure of Chaos, the Briareos-Typhon-Leviathan simile near the opening of the poem (1.199–208) or Python nearer the end (10.530–31), and indeed the cataclysmic battle itself, are all evidence of Milton's fascinated, Isis-like search for the fragments of these ancient tales to which he would (like Origen and Augustine before him) restore their proper shape and place in the narrative.[9]

[9] In *Areopagitica* 29 Milton compares the sifting of Christian truth from deceit to the task of Isis after the dismemberment of Osiris by Typhon, and Patrick remarks on the importance of the allegory for Milton's version of early Church history.

> From that time ever since, the sad friends of Truth, such as durst appear, imitating the careful search that *Isis* made for the mangl'd body of *Osiris*, went up and down gathering limb by

In this respect, as in others, Milton followed the model of those ancient epics that he did know. Resemblances among various stories are part of what composers of epic poems expect their audience to recognize. Thus Homer brings Odysseus's successful homeward journey into parallel with Agamemnon's disastrous return from Troy, and with that of his brother Menelaos, comfortably at home with Helen. Ancient epics also expect us to compare and assess their heroes, so it was part of the convention that enemies are treated fairly, indeed often praised for their courage and heroism. Thus in the *Iliad*, though Achilles may be the main character, Hector has perhaps the larger claim to ordinary human sympathy: for one thing he is married, unlike Achilles, and his wife and son make a wonderful appearance in Book 6, the young son afraid of his military father until he doffs his feathered helmet and smiles. And by the end of the poem, even Achilles has been softened, civilized, by the visit and long dialogue with Priam, Hector's father, who reclaims his dead son's corpse for decent burial.

In the *Aeneid*, though Aeneas is the focus of a Roman audience's interest, since his voyage after the Trojan War was supposed to have been their founding migration, it is nonetheless the defeated leader of the native Latin forces, Turnus—driven mad by his suffering and by the witch Allecto, as by his thwarted love for the princess Lavinia—who draws much of the reader's sympathy. One may go further and argue that in these epics, the central value of heroic literature—military prowess or the quest for a "name"—is seriously called into question by being situated in these wider human contexts: of sexual passion, of family, of the large-scale displacement of peoples.

Thus when Milton cites these epics at the beginning of Book 9, and claims to have superseded their outdated values, we must recall these human qualities of the ancient models and ask ourselves whether in the figure of Satan Milton has not also paid tribute to that world even as he invites us to leave it behind. Not only is his military leadership amply praised, his courage and inventiveness, but Satan, like Hector, has an encounter with his wife and son just as he is about to set off on his adventures through Chaos (though Sin and Death make a family rather different from Andromache and Astyanax). And Turnus is invoked explicitly, and becomes in his passion for "Lavinia disespoused" a classical precedent for Adam—and in his wrath, following Achilles', a further model for Satan.

In the same way as all these various stories reflect each other, human and divine levels of action intertwine, such that quarrels among men set off or extend similar quarrels among the gods. The opening question for the Muse, "What god was it that set them to conflict?" (*Iliad* 1.8) is immediately an-

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limb still as they would find them. We have not yet found them all, Lords and Commons, nor ever shall doe, till her Masters second comming. (PM p. 317).

See also David Loewenstein, *Milton and the Drama of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 44–45, on the powerful image of the virgin truth cut to pieces and scattered, and compare PL 12.536 on Truth "Bestuck with slandrous darts."

swered: Apollo's anger at the king is what drove the foul pestilence among the people. Vergil's imitation is more philosophical: "Is there such anger in the minds of the gods?" (*Aeneid* 1.11); he is asking not for the story, as Homer does, but for the reasons behind it. Milton copies this for his own war: "In heav'nly spirits could such perverseness dwell?" (6.788), but for the initiating question of the poem as a whole he follows Homer and asks his Muse a narrative question: "what cause / Mov'd our Grand Parents . . . to fall off . . . ? Who first seduc'd them to that foul revolt?" (1.28–33). To which the reply is immediate: "Th' infernal Serpent, he it was" (1.34). And the poem has begun. It is to be the story of the infernal serpent, and his doings. We move immediately into the summary of the war and the fall from heaven and then to our discovery of "th' Arch-Enemy" in Hell. Like Vergil's, the poem will explore the connection between divine and earthly action. But the main answer to the poem's initial question is that extraordinary enigma, Satan.

Though he follows it closely, then, Milton turns the epic tradition on its head in one respect: he made Satan himself, the old enemy, the hero, or at least candidate for hero, of his poem: his is the main point of view from which we experience the action, at least at the start. Perhaps it is closer to the mark to call him a parody of the epic hero, as most respectable critics have done for over a century, but if so, one should be careful not to withhold the due measure of admiration that would accrue to an epic hero achieving the kinds of exploits Satan does. He is a variant of Achilles, who equates honor with his own status (the complex Greek notion of *arete*) and feels slighted by his commander-in-chief, refuses his orders and believes himself superior. Both epics turn on the connection between "a sense of injur'd merit" and the hero's wrath. He is Odysseus or Jason on their heroic voyages, leader and chief warrior in battle during and after the War in Heaven, and through it all the most powerful speaker, able to rally and organize his troops with the eloquence of his appeals to their own heroic values. Even more, perhaps, he is the epic enemy, Turnus especially, but moved to the center of attention at the beginning of the poem rather than waiting to come on in the second part of the action. The heroic values that Satan embodies are present early, and only gradually diminished.

3. *Hesiod*

Prior to, or apart from, moral evaluation, then, the plot requires an angel who rebels against the terms of God's rule—a widespread narrative in antiquity. Hesiod's *Theogony* was an especially important predecessor for Milton since it provided the major ancient model of an epic that sided with the rebel (without appearing to do so). Zeus the hero rebels against the established order of the older gods, but the poem does not admit this. Logic (and innumerable narrative precedents like *Enuma Eliš* or *The Song of Ullikummi* that have now

been recovered by archaeology) requires the younger gods to rebel against the older—but Hesiod makes it seem as if the older gods, the Titans, are the rebels. This is an instance of a basic truth about these combat myths—which of the two opponents is the rebel will depend on whose side you support. Milton was a good reader of Hesiod and the other epics, and so knew that these ancient texts may contradict each other or contain hidden myths or subtexts held, but repressed, within them.

The battle with Typhon or Typhoeus, Hesiod's infernal serpent, is a good instance. He is the youngest child of Gaea and Tartaros,[10] and an impressive monster he is: a fearful dragon with a hundred snake-heads and flickering tongues, eyes that blaze fire, and he makes dire noises: the bellow of a bull, the roar of a lion, the yelp of young dogs, the hiss of snakes. On the day of his birth, sings Hesiod, dreadful deeds would have been accomplished, and he would have become the ruler of mortals and immortals alike. But Zeus gets in first. He takes swift notice, thunders loudly and fiercely so that all Ocean, Tartaros, and Olympus shake. An immensely destructive battle ensues and eventually Zeus hurls the monster down maimed, and "Earth gave a groan." The earth burns and melts like iron in a forge of Hephaestus. Typhon is cast down into Tartaros. There he remains, and becomes the source of cruel winds on sea and land.

Milton makes various uses of this episode. His God, like Zeus, notices the rebel (though Milton allows him to get a good deal further than does Hesiod), and takes action. The idea that dreadful deeds "would have been accomplished" is picked up for Satan's confrontation with Death, and again when he squares off against Gabriel. Suddenly, and surprisingly, the Satan who has been sneaking around in the garden becomes dilated, "Like *Teneriff* or *Atlas* unremov'd: / His stature reacht the Skie" (4.987). Atlas is a mountain, of course, but also the name of the Titan brother of Prometheus in Hesiod. Now, says Milton's epic narrator, "dreadful deeds / Might have ensu'd" (4.990–91), and the next lines imagine similar destructions to those caused by the Zeus-Typhon combat. But the golden Scales intervene, an image taken from Homer and Vergil, but given the kind of cosmic scope appropriate to Hesiod by identification with the constellation Libra. Finally, the "might have" device is echoed in the War in Heaven, which is Milton's principal borrowing from Hesiod: "now all Heav'n / Had gon to wrack, with ruin overspred, / Had not th' Almightie Father . . . " (6.669–71), and we expect God to stop the ruin. But he doesn't. The passage continues by saying that he is aware of it all, and permits the destruction in order to fulfill his great purpose, "To honour his Anointed Son aveng'd / Upon his enemies, and to declare / All power on him transferr'd" (6.676–78). Milton's God is full of surprises, and more like Zeus

[10] *Theogony* 821–80. Only here is Tartaros a person rather than a place: in the B-scholion of *Iliad* 2.783, the father is (indirectly) Kronos.

than his less robust defenders would admit. Here Milton increases the difficulty by first offering us a God who foresees the problem and protects the cosmos from disaster, but then withdrawing him immediately in favour of a God who seeks honor and vengeance for his Son.

Beneath this fairly obvious use of Hesiod, though, Milton sees the oddities of the *Theogony*. Not only does Zeus attack Typhon before he has actually done anything except breathe his first fiery sighs, indeed on the day of his birth, but the latter is, as his progeny make clear, the final effort of the earlier generation to defend their rights after Zeus's defeat of the Titans. These ambiguities—who does what first; that is, who started it—are reproduced when Milton tells his own version of the rebellion myth.

The Typhon myth was already a bit unclear in Hesiod, and that may be partly because he knew a fuller version in which Zeus's power was much more radically threatened, the version as it was told later in Apollodorus. Here Typhon does attack, hurling stones and breathing fire, and the terrified gods flee to Egypt. This motif appears also in Pindar's version, in which the gods turn themselves into animals to get away. Zeus, however, stands firm. He attacks Typhon, who flees to Mount Casius in Syria, where there was a cult of Zeus and which was identified with the Zaphon of the Ugaritic texts, where there was a cult of Baal. Baal-Zaphon and Zeus-Casius appear to have been different forms of the same cult figure.

Typhon and Zeus now do battle again in Apollodorus, but Typhon gets hold of Zeus's weapon, his sickle, and severs his "sinews." He then carries the lamed and impotent god to Cilicia and hides him in the Corcyrian cave. In Milton, always alert to ancient geography, Typhon thus becomes quite casually one of those "whom the Fables name of monstrous size, / *Titanian*, or *Earth-born*, that warr'd on *Jove*," he "who the Den / By ancient *Tarsus* held" (1.197–200). This defeat episode of the Typhon myth is so widely attested for the parallel combat myths of the Hurrian-Hittite and West Semitic contexts that it may well have been part of an early Greek variant. If so, then it is easy to see how much Hesiod concealed, and why he could not conceal it more thoroughly.[11] Eventually the sinews are recovered by Hermes and Pan, and Zeus is rescued. He renews battle, mounts his chariot, and hurls his thunderbolts. Typhon makes another stand, hurling whole mountains at Zeus, but Zeus turns them aside, as in the Assyrian Ninurta myth, and finally traps Typhon under Etna.

Obviously this story is a prototype of Milton's War in Heaven, in which hills are also "Hurl'd to and fro with jaculation dire" (6.665). By the time Milton made his uses of Typhon, however, the ancient myths had been radically transformed. Typhon was equated with the Egyptian Seth, brother and

[11] Further discussion of this suggestion is to be found in Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, pp. 76–89.

rival of Osiris; Milton knew Plutarch's version,[12] the one he refers to in *Areopagitica*. Origen had had to cope with the pagan philosopher Celsus's attack on Christian uses of myth: Celsus claimed that the Christians misunderstood "the mysteries which affirm that the Titans and giants fought with the gods, and in the mysteries of the Egyptians which tell of Typhon and Horus and Osiris." These mysteries, thought Celsus, need to be understood philosophically, which means allegorically; that is, that, as Heraclitus proclaimed, "everything comes into being through strife and necessity." Origen, however, for whom that philosophical idea is profoundly un-Christian, insists that these stories are debased versions of biblical narratives: one of his few examples is the story that the serpent, original of Pherecydes' Ophioneus (Greek *ophis* = serpent), who battled with Kronos, a variant of the Zeus-Typhon combat, was the cause of man's expulsion from Paradise.[13]

And Augustine, one of the most intelligent and inventive readers of ancient texts, often uses the word *tyfus*. Presumably he was aware of its history. As a Greek loanword, it sticks out rather oddly in his elegant Latin, yet its meaning is purely Augustinian: pride or arrogance. At *Confessions* 3.3, for example, he writes "Gaudebam superbe et tumebam tyfo," accusing his own vanity as a young and enthusiastic student of rhetoric: "I was pleased with myself, proud and swelling with arrogance." Almost certainly Augustine knew Plato's moralizing play with the name *Typhon*. In the *Phaedrus* 229e–230a, Socrates announces his scorn for those who rationalize myths. He prefers self-examination, on the Delphic principle, to see whether "I am a wild beast more complex than Typhon or more puffed up with the fumes of pride [*epitethumenon*], or whether I am a simpler being . . . not puffed up [*atuphou*]". Socrates is playing on the root meanings of "wind" (whence "typhoon") and "smoke" in order to draw his moral: myths can be used as mirrors. And a long tradition thereafter used the word in this or similar senses. Arnobius, for example, called any heretical opponent of Christianity *typhus*. Converting Typhon into the "fumes" or "empty wind" of pride is a move that uses the allegoriz-

[12] Jacques Boulogne, "Typhon, une figure du Mal chez Plutarque," in *Imaginaires du Mal*, ed. Myriam Watthee-Delmotte and Paul-Augustin Deproost (Paris: Cerf, 2000), pp. 43–53.

[13] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.42. Eusebius also mentions the Pherecydes version of the myth, which survives only in fragments like these. Apollonius also tells of "Ophion" and his wife Eurynome, from whom, rather than from Ouranos (Heaven) and Gaia, Kronos took power after a combat. See Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, pp. 68–75. Milton very oddly inserts this reference between the devils' punishment as serpents and the arrival of Sin and Death on earth; he has his scattered devils as the original tellers of this tale, linking Eurynome and Eve "perhaps" (10.578–84). Fowler ad loc thinks Claudian *De Raptu Proserpinae* 3.332–56 was also a source, since there Ophion retains his serpent form. At any rate, Milton here offers a variant of his own War in Heaven, and shows that he followed Justin and Origen in believing classical or heathen mythology to be linked to Christian myth—but he does not, here at least, call it debased. The word "Fabl'd" (10.580) is not necessarily pejorative.

ing of a Celsus without violating the insistence of an Origen on the belatedness of such Greek and Egyptian myths.[14]

Typhon was finally imprisoned under Etna, which makes him the original of the following passage in which Milton imagines Satan's flight from the burning lake to a landing on the shore and shows himself alert to most or all of the above range of meanings, including clearly the stench of wind that Luther in his privy and many psychologists associate with Satan.[15]

> as when the force
> Of subterranean wind transports a Hill
> Torn from *Pelorus*, or the shatter'd side
> Of thundring *Ætna*, whose combustible
> And fewel'd entrals thence conceiving Fire,
> Sublim'd with Mineral fury, aid the Winds,
> And leave a singed bottom all involv'd
> With stench and smoak: Such resting found the sole
> Of unblest feet.
>
> (PL 1.230–38)

This move is characteristic of Milton, conflating ancient myth and moral philosophy with geological, alchemical, and scatological language.[16] The Renaissance still thought of earthquakes as produced by buried winds,[17] and Milton merely adds the moral, and the bodily, parallel.

And soon he adds the emotion, rage, and makes fun of it. Left to themselves, the devils look for ways to occupy themselves in Hell, and some of them start to tear up hills and so on, like Typhoeus:

[14] Pierre Courcelles, *Opuscula Selecta* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1984), p. 350.

[15] Eric Erikson, *Young Man Luther* (New York: Norton, 1958), pp. 40, 58–62; Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1970), pp. 207–8. Among the scatological associations Brown cites are Dante, *Inferno* 24.67–73; Bosch "in the panel depicting this world as Hell enthrones Satan on a privy, from which the souls that have passed out of his anus drop into the black pit"; and Ben Jonson's "Ballad of the Devil's Arse: the Gypsies Metamorphos'd," lines 1061–1137.

[16] Michael Lieb, *The Dialectics of Creation: Patterns of Birth and Regeneration in* Paradise Lost (Amherst: University of Massachussetts Press, 1970), pp. 28–34. Both RM (nn.88, 90, p. 361) and Leonard ad loc note the imagery. Leonard adduces other descriptions of Etna, such as *Aeneid* 3. 570–82 and *Metamorphoses* 5.346–58, the latter of which retells the Typhon story.

[17] Ovid so describes earthquakes at *Met.* 15.296–377, explaining the severance of Sicily from Italy, and cf. Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy* 2.2.3, who surmises the earth may "be full of wind, or sulfureous, innate fire, as our Meteorologists inform us, which sometimes breaking out, causeth horrible earthquakes," cited by Hughes ad loc. "Wind" is almost as common a word as "air" in *Paradise Lost*, whether as fact or as metaphor, for example, in the Paradise of Fools, where all those hoods and cowls are "The sport of Winds: all these upwhirld aloft / Fly o'er the backside of the World" (3.493–94), where two kinds of wind are again at issue. Compare "Disburd'nd Heav'n rejoic'd" (6.878) for the obviously scatological expulsion of the defeated angels at the end of that long constipation that is the three-day war.

> Others with vast *Typhœan* rage more fell
> Rend up both Rocks and Hills, and ride the Air
> In whirlwind; Hell scarce holds the wilde uproar.
>
> (PL 2.539–41)

The play on "typhoon" here becomes explicit, and the passage seems to add what had never been associated with Typhon in antiquity: the idea of witches riding the wind. And once again the War in Heaven is anticipated, since there, too, the angels imitate their Hesiodic progeny, the Titans, and throw rocks and hills and mountains (6.639–66).[18] And it is not, as some commentators mistakenly think, Milton's rebel angels who initiate this, but rather God's army, as a response to the invention of gunpowder. Their volley of hills buries the cannons. Quickly the rebels respond, and we enjoy a scene of mass confusion of the sort Hesiod portrays.[19] Heaven is gradually turned into Hell.

> So Hills amid the Air encounterd Hills
> Hurl'd to and fro with jaculation dire,
> That under ground they fought in dismal shade.
>
> (PL 6.664–66)

The absurdity of the utter reversal of value, such that angels are fighting in Heaven but underground, is perhaps enhanced for some readers by the fact that that last line, in which "dismal" recalls its etymology from *dies mali* (day of evil), is line 666 of Book 6.

4. *Apocalypses*

Within Judaism the ancient myth-language had been taken up or revived by apocalyptic and sectarian movements like the one responsible for the now-famous scrolls recovered since the 1940s from the Qumran caves above the Dead Sea, or the one which soon formed around the figure of Jesus.[20] Members of such movements saw themselves as engaged in spiritual battles fought out at both cosmic and earthly levels, and they adopted the widespread myths of combat to tell their story to themselves and make sense of the terrifying political events of the period. The Dead Sea Scrolls are the records of a Puri-

[18] George F. Butler argues that the source of this and other such passages is likely to be Nonnos as much as Hesiod or Ovid. He neglects Apollodorus but offers useful evidence for the influence of Nonnos in the Renaissance, "Nonnos and Milton's 'Vast *Typhoean* rage': The *Dionysiaca* and *Paradise Lost*," *Milton Quarterly* 33 (1999): 71–76. Leonard's commentary on the war offers many parallels with Hesiod, e.g. at 6.833, "steadfast Empyrean shook," he notes "So Olympus shook when Zeus went out to fight Typhoeus (*Theogony* 842–43), but he adds, what is normal in Milton, the biblical parallel, here Isaiah 13.12, "I will Shake the heavens."

[19] Revard, *War in Heaven*, pp. 192–94, contrasts the Miltonic scene with other Renaissance epics, less obviously echoing Hesiod, but also shows how Milton uses Claudian and Nonnos.

[20] Norman Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 188–211.

tanical (and all-male) Jewish sect, probably the Essenes described by Josephus. They record a belief in apocalyptic interpretations of prophetic texts like Isaiah and Hosea, expounded by a "Teacher of Righteousness," in the sense that time would soon end and the Sons of Light would prevail in the final battle over the armies of the Angel of Darkness. Satan, or more often Belial, is the leader of these hostile forces, who function both at the heavenly level, as angels, and at the earthly, as the majority of the community's fellow Jews, those who have stayed behind in Jerusalem and try to reach an accomodation with the foreign rulers.

A long tradition lies behind this idea of human-as-cosmic conflict. In the Old Testament, Yahweh aligns himself with Israel, and so has enemies when Israel does: "If thou wilt indeed obey, then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies and an adversary unto thine adversaries" (Exod. 23.22). In the apocalyptic Book of Daniel, this tendency has expanded to the idea of the guardian angels of the nations; Michael, Israel's angel, is the most powerful, and in the last battle he will defeat the fourth oppressor, patron angel of Greece, and deliver his people (Daniel was written during the anti-Jewish pogroms of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in Palestine, so for Greece read the Seleucids, successors of Alexander the Great). These enemies are also pictured as stars, and as chaos-monsters emerging from the turbulent sea.[21] The deliverance, though it uses human instruments, was to be God's work, and in the vision it is "the Ancient of Days" who judges and sentences the beast to destruction.

This apocalyptic tendency to use the combat myth to polarize moral issues into black and white opposites, and so to demonize "the Other," even those like the Jerusalem Jews who are closest to oneself, was especially strong among the first Christians,[22] but in the process that led to the invention of the Satan figure the tendency was carried one step further. It was customary that the enemy figures in the myths have significant personal names: the Babylonian Tiamat, a female monster, has a name cognate with Hebrew *tehōm*, chaos; the Huwawa (Humbaba) of the Gilgamesh cycle is a personification of the forest; the enemies in the Canaanite or West Semitic traditions that are often echoed in the Old Testament had proper names like Lotan (which turned into Leviathan), Nahar (River), or Yamm, a personification of the sea, and thus another figure of chaos; while the bright rebel of Near Eastern tradition, who appears in various forms as Athtar, Phaethon, or Helel, the harbinger of Dawn, eventually becomes Lucifer (light-bearer) in Jerome's Latin Bible. But in the Jewish, and then much more so in the Christian, tradition, the name that came to dominate and to include all of the others was the most general: "satan" is the Hebrew for "adversary," and "devil" comes from its Greek

[21] Ibid., pp. 170–71.

[22] This is the main subject of Elaine Pagels's disturbing book, *The Origin of Satan* (New York: Vintage, 1995), despite the misleading title.

equivalent, *diabolos*, which means simply "opponent" in the etymological sense of "obstruction," something placed in the way. So it is enmity itself that is signalled by the name of the Christian enemy. When Milton's hero calls himself Satan, for the only time in the poem, at 10.386, the point is quite explicitly the meaning of his name: "(for I glorie in the name, / Antagonist of Heav'ns Almightie King)."

5. *The satan*

Once we try to trace Satan back further than the New Testament and its immediate apocalyptic precursors like the Essenes, we soon lose touch with the combat myth. There is a Satan figure of a sort in the book Christians call the Old Testament, but he is decidedly less powerful and almost never an independent figure, indeed not necessarily evil at all: in the story of Balaam and his ass at Numbers 22.22, an angel of Yahweh is called a satan because he is sent as an obstacle to "oppose" Balaam's further progress along the wrong path. Here, since the path is bad, the obstruction is good. When the word appears as a title, "the satan," he is still in fact a member of the heavenly court, an ancient mythological concept that preserves the polytheistic inheritance of the Hebrews and occurs at various points in the Bible.

The best-known incident is that in the Book of Job, where the satan is a kind of prosecutor or attorney general who is granted God's permission to act as the tempter of man after a dialogue with God about the source of Job's virtue. In that dialogue, God twice asks the satan where he comes from, which suggests, perhaps, that he may at times be beyond God's reach, and the answer indeed is that he has been roaming around on the earth. The word used here, *sut*, may suggest a pun on satan's name, and it may also imply he is a kind of spy or agent provocateur, like "The King's Eye" in the Persian secret police structure, a much hated figure in occupied Israel.[23] In Zechariah 3.1 we find a similar figure, a satan as accuser of Joshua the high priest, but here he is rebuked by Yahweh's angel for having overstepped his remit.

The only time we find a figure who is apparently named "Satan" (since the word occurs without the definite article) is in the Book of Chronicles. He tempts David to commit the much-loathed act of holding a census (numbering the people as a preliminary to imposing the tools of bureaucracy, like taxation), and for this all Israel is punished by Yahweh with a plague. The point where the punishment stops is ever after commemorated by the building

[23] The Job commentary of Tur-Sinai (1957) is the first reference to this idea known to me. In *Old Enemy*, pp. 110–15, I likened the satan to J. Edgar Hoover, who as head of the FBI was nominally doing the will of the president but gradually began to act on his own initiative to plan the harassment of Martin Luther King or develop subtle strategems to poison Castro's cigars. For the various developments see the thorough study by Rivkah Schärf Klüger, *The Satan of the Old Testament* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1967).

of the first temple in Jerusalem. This is an especially interesting moment, since the earlier account of this episode, the one in the Deuteronomic historian, 2 Samuel 24.1, makes no reference to Satan: rather it is Yahweh himself who tempts David directly—and then punishes him. It looks as if the Chronicler is the first known writer who makes use of Satan in order to protect God from his own more destructive or arbitrary nature: as the idea of a good Yahweh develops, instead of an amoral nationalistic deity, Satan begins to take over his unsavory side.[24] The immediate risk of this new version of an old narrative is dualism, when eventually the world is divided between the wills of two gods, not subject to one. Milton was aware of this risk, as he acknowledges.[25] And indeed one role Satan is to play in *Paradise Lost* is to project and play out the consequences of that metaphysical dualism: he certainly believes himself to be a kind of alternative power to God. In Milton, though, he does not stop that uncomfortable regression whereby we go back from Eve to the apple to Satan to Lucifer (in some versions of the myth the earlier name of Satan), and inevitably conclude that God is responsible for everything in the world, including evil. But his existence makes the question problematic, and Milton wants his readers to ask it specifically, as he does himself in his treatise.

This Old Testament Satan gradually overlaps with the old enemy of the ancient combat myth. In the second century B.C.E. *Book of Jubilees 23.29* and in the *Assumption of Moses 10.1*, both contemporary with the Book of Daniel and thus with anti-Jewish pogroms of the Seleucid Antiochus IV in Palestine, we find the earliest parallels for the Chronicler's use of the word Satan as a personal name. The Essenes, at about the same time, adopted a fairly elaborate angelology, expounded in the *Book of Enoch*, including the myth of the fallen "Watcher" angels, who lusted after human women. Their leader, called both *Aśa'el* and *Šemiḥazah* (Shemhazai)—hereafter anglicized as Asa'el and Semihazah, respectively—is certainly a prototype of the New Testament Satan, but, in the form of the myth that appears in the Qumran texts, he is already being punished in Hell: in the *Book of Jubilees*, however, he is still free to walk the earth a certain time. This Watcher myth appears in a fragmentary form in Genesis 6.1–4, where it accounts for a legend about giants and precedes the story of the Flood. It was very widespread in the so-called intertestamental period, as we can tell from its presence in the elaborate Enoch literature, many copies of which have been deciphered in the Qumran fragments and which survives in various translations. For Milton the myth was connected with Satan

[24] Milton expounds the Samuel passage at some length in the *De doctrina Christiana* (YP 6.332–36), explaining God's propensity to seem to drive men to sin, but, seeming suddenly to spot the Chronicles variant, with palpable relief swoops on it as a better explanation: "As for the business of the numbering of the people by David, it can be explained by a single word, for it is not God but Satan who is said to have incited him, II Sam. xxiv 1, I Chron. xxi 1."

[25] *De doctrina Christiana* (YP 6.131), where he argues against those who separate nature or fate from God, and then merely insists evil cannot be stronger than good.

only because the fallen angels are called "the Sons of God" in the Genesis fragment, and he has much play with the ambiguities of that term, especially in *Paradise Regain'd*.[26] Belial, it is true, retains traces of this group of lustful angels,[27] but, though he knew the myth, Milton's own version of the fall of the angels comes from elsewhere, as we shall shortly see.

6. *The New Testament*

In its earliest phase the Jesus movement was one among many apocalyptic sects that arose within the turmoil of Judaism after the Greek Seleucids, and then the Romans, had become the principal authority in the region. The turmoil culminated in the destruction of the temple itself during the rising against the Romans of 66–70 C.E., which is usually regarded as the context for the Gospel of Mark.[28] The most obvious sign of the continuity between Jewish apocalyptic and Christianity is the Book of Revelation. It was written for Christians who apparently still felt themselves to be Jews—in fact, the only true Jews, since the others belong to the synagogue of Satan (Rev. 2.9). It opens with a set of letters addressed to the seven churches in the region of Ephesus, and contains a series of visions that make constant reference to Israel's prophetic tradition, and to the apocalypse of Daniel. Chapters 12 and 13 offer a remarkable and elaborate version of cosmic combat,[29] in which a great dragon, Satan, "that old serpent," attacks the stars and flings a third of them down, then tries to devour the child born of a woman clothed like the sun. But God takes up the child to himself, and the woman hides in the wilderness. This rescue triggers the War in Heaven, in which Michael, now the champion of the church, does battle with and defeats Satan (each with a host of angels in support). Heavenly events represent those on earth: the woman clothed with the sun is Israel, and the child both Christ and the new Church. At the end of the battle, Satan and his angels are cast out, but into the earth, where they are allowed to pursue their mischief. Two beasts are his allies, the one representing the Roman Empire (not the Seleucid as in Daniel), and the second the false prophet (from 2 Thessalonians) or priest of the Romans. Satan, who is thus

[26] On the difference between the two poems in this respect, see Edward E. Ericson, Jr., "The Sons of God in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*," *Milton Quarterly* 25 (1991): 79–89. James Grantham Turner, *One Flesh: Paradisal Marriage and Sexual Relations in the Age of Milton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 268–71, discusses Milton's uncertainty about the meaning of these verses. See below, chap. 3, at n. 49, and chap. 8, n. 29.

[27] "Set women in his eye and in his walk," *Paradise Regain'd* 2.153, is his advice to Satan on how to tempt Jesus. The language of Belial's speech clearly echoes that of the "Daughters of Men" description in PL 11.581–627, as well as Genesis 6.1–4.

[28] Pagels, *Origins of Satan*, pp. 3–34, but see Norman Cohn's review in the *New York Review of Books*, 21 Sept. 1995: 20.

[29] Adela Yarbro-Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976).

both a political power and the embodiment of all that is wrong with human life, is thrown into the abyss, but at the end of a thousand years his power will be released for a time. Finally fire from heaven destroys the manifestations of the enemy, and after the Last Judgment a new world of bliss and peace will replace the old—the triumphant end of the combat in these apocalyptic variants.

John of Patmos, the putative author, thus looks forward in apocalyptic vein to the end of Satan. In Luke, Jesus himself, at the moment when the seventy disciples return claiming that even the demons are now subject to them in Jesus' name, is reported as saying that he "saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold I have given you power to tread on snakes and scorpions, upon every power of the enemy" (Luke 10.18–20). In Revelation, these unclean spirits or demons issue "like frogs out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of demons, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty"—whereupon "he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon" (Rev. 16.13–16). Though the Book of Revelation has not been universally approved, and Luther, for example, did not like it at all, it had strong impact on the new religion: it was more cited than any other New Testament text by the early Christian writers of the second century.[30] And Milton thought it "the majestick image of a high and stately Tragedy, shutting up and intermingling her solemn Scenes and Acts with a sevenfold *Chorus* of halleluja's and harping symphonies."[31]

Luther objected to the wilder kinds of prophetic interpretation, but he thought the book might be acceptable if it could be seen as referring to the early Church trying to establish itself, when the angels of Michael (faithful Christians) struggled against the angels of the dragon (apostates and pagans) for control.[32] David Paraeus, whom Milton read, along with Jospeh Mede, who taught at Milton's Cambridge college, Christ's, also limited its relevance to the first three hundred years, seeing the Christianizing of Constantine and the empire as the victory of Michael. In sermons and tracts of the seventeenth century, however, the Book of Revelation was taken to be an account of the contemporary life of the "warfaring Christian," and even as the last fight of the warring saints that marked the final stage of world history. The Roman church was the dragon, responsible for the Gunpowder Plot and much else that was devisive and destructive. And the Puritans saw themselves as the saints in their holy war against popery and the established church. In *Eikonoklastes*

[30] Cohn, *Cosmos*, p. 212.

[31] YP 1.815; CM 3.238, cf. the prefatory matter to *Samson Agonistes*. In both places, and elsewhere, Milton relies on the authority of David Pareus (RM pp. 799, 923).

[32] Martin Luther, "Preface to the Revelation of St. John," in *Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955–76), 6.481.

Milton uses some of these terms,[33] but in the *De doctrina Christiana* he is much more circumspect as to the time in which the battle is understood to be taking place. And in the poem, though it obviously has its narrative function in the time of origins, the Urzeit, the three days of the war can be seen as symbolically representing the Crucifixion and Resurrection, and the coming of Christ in a chariot may anticipate the Last Judgment, in the Endzeit.[34] Milton felt free, like many interpreters, to adjust the time scheme and alter event sequences. His Satan, for example, is thrown not directly into the earth, but into Hell. Milton combined the two scenes of Satan being cast out (Rev. 12.9–13 and 20.1–3). And he also knew well enough by now that the Civil War had failed in its objective. Satan is still free to work his mischief on Earth, which required the episode of his escape from Hell, mostly Miltonic invention.

The apocalyptic combat language is undoubtedly present also in Paul, whose letters are the earliest Christian documents. Indeed 1 Thessalonians. 4.16–17 anticipates the end soon: "the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God." In particular, Qumran language appears; for example, the Romans (13.12) are urged to "cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light," while the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 5.5) are called "children of light and children of day." And although we need to tread with a particular delicacy since Paul's Greek is often quite subtle, yet many of the key texts for the development of the Satan story are there—"the rulers of this age" of 1 Corinthians 2.6–8, for example, or "the god of this world" from 2 Corinthians 4.4. Here, too, are political authorities echoed in Milton's formulaic list of angelic titles, "Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Vertues, Powers" (PL 5.601, 772, et cetera): Christ will destroy "every principality and authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15.24–27).[35] There is also a famous reference to the world rulers in Ephesians 6.12, against whom we are to "put on the whole armour of

[33] YP 3.598. In *The Reason of Church Government*, Milton writes of "our old patron Saint George [who] by his matchlesse valour slew . . . that huge dragon of Egypt" (YP 1.857); he aligns George and dragon with Michael and dragon, and also with England's Protestant struggle against seven-headed serpents in Rome or his own war against the prelates, who, like Satan, are "a great Python" (YP 1.858). Cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.438–51, and see Joseph Fontenrose, *Python* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), pp. 13–27, for the full story of Apollo's battle with Python.

[34] William B. Hunter, Jr., "Milton on the Exaltation of the Son: The War in Heaven in *Paradise Lost*," *ELH* 36 (1969): 215–31, argues for the Resurrection; Joseph Summers, *The Muse's Method* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962) p. 135, for the Last Judgment. Many other references are collected in Revard, *War in Heaven*, pp. 108–25. The final transformation of the war into spiritual combat, adumbrated in PL 12, is not fully recounted until *Paradise Regain'd*.

[35] On the question of Paul's combat language, see G. S. Caird, *Principalities and Powers: a Study in Pauline Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), and the more sceptical Wesley Carr, *Angels and Principalities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

God . . . against the wiles of the devil, . . . and having done all to stand," which Milton uses in Michael's prophecy of the spirit writing on men's hearts (12.486–502, an amazingly elaborate sentence)[36] and which is part of the background for the last temptation of Christ by Satan in *Paradise Regain'd*.[37] Paul was apparently steering a careful course among the mythological systems of his time, whether apocalyptic or proto-Gnostic or both, but he is typical in his use of Psalm 110.1: "Sit at my right hand, while I make your enemies your footstool." Paul makes such guarded use of the myth language that the enemies could often be taken to be only human institutions of government. But it is the point of his rhetoric, indeed part of his general doctrine, that human empires and their rulers, like the Roman imperium, must also be seen in the cosmic perspective. That too is what Milton was doing when he transmuted the Civil War in which he had participated into the extended combat of *Paradise Lost*.[38]

Thus the Pauline language shows that the Book of Revelation is not the only apocalypse in the New Testament. And the Gospels, too, reflect the apocalyptic language. By the conventional dating, the immediate context of the earliest Christian gospel, which we know under the name Mark, was the catastrophic rising against the Romans of 66–70 C.E., when the Jerusalem temple was destroyed. This period included intense rivalry among Jewish sects. The figure of Satan is sometimes directly associated with the Jewish opponents of the Jesus sect, who are blamed in the Gospels for Jesus' death even though it was the Roman governor Pilate whose decree was the reason for the Crucifixion. Matthew, which may be some ten years later than Mark, extends the quarrel with the "scribes and Pharisees." And in John, for example, Jesus is quoted as telling "the Jews" that they are children of the Devil and do their father's will (a parody of the Christ's own situation): "he was a murderer from the beginning" (8.44). Yet the struggle with Rome, or with other Jews, was incidental to the infinitely greater war between God and Satan.

In Mark, Jesus' first recorded action is a struggle with Satan in the desert, a brief episode elaborated later by Matthew and Luke and functioning as the necessary testing of the hero before the main encounter with the enemy in the combat myth. Satan is strong enough to be able to offer, beyond some practical magic, just the kind of worldly power denounced by the Qumran sect, and similarly rejected here by Jesus. But the struggle continues: in the rest of his

[36] Flannagan (RM, no.143, p. 704) describes this part of the speech as a tissue of Pauline quotations.

[37] I discuss this connection in Neil Forsyth, "Having Done All to Stand: Biblical and Classical Allusion in *Paradise Regained*," *Milton Studies* 21, ed. James D. Simmonds (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986), pp. 199–214.

[38] See Revard, *War in Heaven*, pp. 86–147, for the use of this language in Renaissance epics ("War becomes the business of Renaissance poets—their main business") and seventeenth-century theology. Cf. John Coolidge, *The Pauline Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).

career, Jesus casts out plentiful demons and in Mark 13 expounds a typical apocalyptic vision of the imminent kingdom of God. The earliest Christian expectation was that God was about to reveal his power by defeating Satan and bringing in the age prophesied by Isaiah, an age of boundless fertility and plenty when, and quite specifically, there would be no more Satan.

The unique ingredient of the Jesus sect that made it different from the other Jewish groups and eventually led to its success was the essential point already made in Paul's letters: the apparent defeat of the Crucifixion was in fact a cunning victory, and was in any case annulled by the Resurrection, which thus became the triumph characteristic of the last episode in the combat myth. The Gospels build on this mythological idea in order to show how an unsuccessful prophet, betrayed by one of his own followers and brutally executed by the Romans, could in fact be God's anointed, the Messiah. Mark is reticent, ending with the enigmatically empty tomb. But Matthew, Luke, and John all develop the episode thoroughly, and in Luke and John there is further elaboration, combining cosmic and earthly levels of action, whereby Satan enters into Judas the betrayer to bring on the crisis.

One striking difference, though, between the synoptic Gospels and John is in the treatment of Jesus' spiritual opponents. The parallel Beelzebul passages (Mark 3.23–27, Matt. 12.25–29, Luke 11.17–22) depict the power of Jesus over demons as the evidence that God's kingdom has broken into the present world order, and the demons are also an organized army under "Beelzebul, the prince of demons," who is apparently equated by Jesus with Satan. These demons ("devils" in the Authorized Version) are extremely common in the biblical language: *daimon* or especially *daimonion* occur some 70 times, with *pneuma*, or more usually *pneuma akatharton*, also frequent. The commissioning accounts in the synoptic Gospels (Mark 3.13–19, 6.7–13, Matt. 10.7–8, Luke 9.1–2) authorize the disciples to continue the process of throwing out demons, and this is picked up in Acts 5.16 and 8.5–12. Peter's account of Jesus' activity also gives prominence to his "doing good acts and healing those who were under the power of the devil, *diabolou*"). But in John's gospel, all this might never have happened. Instead everything is focused on the "hour" as it approaches: the cosmic language of Qumran recurs about children of light and darkness, and Jesus says that now is the "crisis" (12.31) of this world, when the prince of this world is to be cast out.

7. *The Early Church*

These sharp divergences among the New Testament texts would allow great freedom to subsequent mythologizers, but they have long since been smoothed out by generations of theologians: indeed it was one of the earliest tasks of the new Church, as the Jesus movement turned into Christianity, to try to harmonize their various belief-narratives, orally transmitted, then written down by

those unknown persons to whom the names of the gospel writers have been given, then into a single coherent tale like the *Diatessaron*, and on into doctrine. By the third century at least it had become a basic tenet of the Christian salvation narrative that, as Origen put it, Christ died to destroy a great demon, in fact the ruler of demons, who held in subjection the souls of humanity.[39]

The Beelzebul of the Gospels is connected with Baal,[40] with whose priests Elijah had a famous contest in the Old Testament Book of Kings. In the New Testament, rivalry with the by-now-dominant Greco-Roman religion is implicit (for the beasts and Antichrist of Revelation read the Roman Empire and its emperors),[41] sometimes explicit, as in Christ's verbal duel with the Pharisees that ends with the compromise advice to "render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and unto God that which is God's." So the New Testament demons soon took on aspects of the rival religions. It quickly became a commonplace in the early Church that the pagan gods were actually disguised devils (Milton's catalog of fallen angels derives from this idea, and the line that introduces it, "And Devils to adore for Deities" (1.373), complicates it by a characteristic sound-pattern of alliteration and assonance):[42] this teaching develops from the Jewish tradition of equating demons with false gods, as in Leviticus 17.7 or Deuteronomy 32.17, and is continued by Paul, who warns his followers against idolatry in 1 Corinthians 10.20, saying that Gentiles sacrifice not to God but to demons.

In the second century Justin Martyr made a lot of the identification of pagan gods with devils, and it was fully developed by Athenagoras. Celsus, the most articulate pagan critic of Christianity, attacked it on precisely these grounds, that it took those old myths so seriously that it told its own version of them, and so became dualistic, believing in two powers in the universe rather than one. Origen felt it necessary to defend his faith against these

[39] Origen's views are summarized in Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, vol 1 (University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 149–51.

[40] Baal means "Lord" and was prefixed to the names of various deities, such as Baal-Peor and Baal-Zeboul. The name Beelzeboul, in the variant Baalzebub, occurs once in the Old Testament (2 Kings 1.2).

[41] Yarbro-Collins, *The Combat Myth*, pp. 172–84; Bernard McGinn, *The Antichrist* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994), pp. 48–56. The logic of the Antichrist myth mirrors that of Christology, since Nero is the Devil incarnate. The easiest interpretation of the mysterious number of the Beast in Revelation 13.18 is that 666 is gematria, or number symbolism, based on the Hebrew *nrwn qsr*, "Nero Emperor".

[42] See Stanley Fish, "Why Literary Criticism is Like Virtue," in the *London Review of Books*, 10 June 1993, pp. 14–15. "What then is the line finally saying, that there is a huge difference between devils and deities or that there is practically (a word precisely intended) no difference between devils and deities? The answer . . . is that the line is saying both: the difference is huge; the difference is very small. And there is no paradox because the largeness and smallness exist on different levels." No paradox? Perhaps he means no contradiction. The explanation of the "different levels" turns, typically for Fish, on the distinction between the surface, the eye of the flesh, which responds to the likeness of the words, and the inner eye which sees the moral truth.

charges, and thus arose the first and, before Augustine, the most elaborate account of what Christians believed, especially the first fully developed picture of the Devil and his origin as an envious member of the heavenly court. Thus the combat enemy of ancient Near Eastern mythology was welded back into the picture of a satan as it came down to Origen: he gathered together and thought through the Old Testament passages that he saw as references to the early part of the story, such as the Lucifer text from Isaiah 14 and those about the prince of Tyre from Ezekiel 28, and then those in the apocryphal and apocalyptic intertestamental literature, like the Enoch books, and finally the several passages in the New Testament about demons and Satan.[43]

Soon the idea developed that during his three (two) days of death before the Resurrection, Christ had descended into Hell and there rescued saints and those unjustly condemned in the pre-Christian period (Adam perhaps included). In the *Gospel of Nicodemus* the tradition became a full-fledged narrative, involving a discussion between Satan and Hell (Hades) over the identity of Jesus and the validity of his claims. Satan claims he is a mere man, since he was heard to say he feared death, but they then agree that he is their enemy, and probably divine as well, since he was able, by the power of his word, to revive Lazarus, four days dead, fetid and decomposing though he was. This tradition evidently builds on the New Testament belief in the victory of Christ over death, as well as on various brief references to Hell. It shows how quickly the ingredients of the creed could generate new myths, or rather new episodes in the old combat myth.[44]

8. *Heresy*

Satan the rebel was quickly seen in the early Church as a cosmic projection or explanation for the many different choices believers, not following any orthodoxy, kept making about what to believe. The word in Greek for these choices is *haereses* and it was in opposition to various of these heresies that what came to be called "orthodoxy," even the very existence of a Church, established itself. From the point of view of the bishops and early teachers like Justin or Irenaeus or Tertullian, and later Augustine, the struggle with heresy in the early Church reproduced (and so, from our point of view, helped to construct) the story of what had first gone wrong in the world, the rebellion in heaven and more especially the serpent's temptation in the garden. Heretics were apostates, following the one great and original Apostate (PL 1.125, et cetera). They were misreaders of the Scriptures (or makers of their own) and it was, said Irenaeus and Tertullian, the Devil who inspired them. Never mind that, as

[43] For more thorough analysis of Origen, see Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, chap. 21.

[44] See ibid., pp. 231–32, 301. The early "Descensus ad Inferos" tradition has now been thoroughly studied by René Gounelle, *L'institutionalisation de la croyance en la descente du Christ aux enfers* (Paris: Institut d'Etudes Augustiniennes, 2000).

is clear from Paul's letters, the earliest Church was alive with controversy about the meanings of Christ's life and the new teaching, or, as Milton seems to have known, that the heresies were often older than orthodoxy: "Who finds not that *Irenaeus, Epiphanius, Jerom*, and others discover more heresies than they well confute, and that oft for heresie which is the truer opinion."[45] A narrative was soon contructed that made heresies a falling away from the original truth, and that narrative eventually imposed itself throughout Christendom and shaped the story of original evil as it was gradually put together in the writings of various "Fathers of the Church," especially Origen, Tertullian, and Augustine.[46] In each case some important opponents made rival claims, and the orthodox story emerged to counter their beliefs. Thus the quarrel with Gnostic heretics may have caused the text of Revelation to be read as an interpretation of Genesis, perhaps even caused it to be canonized,[47] since although there are hints in Paul, it was the only biblical text that could be read as an explicit identification of the "old serpent" (Rev. 12.9, 20.2) with the Devil, in the face of a Gnostic heresy that identified the serpent with Christ, the bringer of wisdom.[48]

Often these rival systems had elaborate spiritual or mythological narratives to tell, especially, as Tertullian complains, about the origin of evil, and the Fathers felt the need to reply with their own fully articulated myths.[49] In some of these Gnostic systems, evil came into being with the Creation, since an ignorant god, the Demiurge, who had forgotten his own origins, made the

[45] *Areopagitica* 14, YP 2.518. Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1972), is the standard argument for the primacy of heresy over orthodoxy.

[46] See the allegory Milton constructs in *Areopagitica* 29 (PM, p. 317; YP 2:549), and see n. 9, above, about "the sad friends of Truth" and "a wicked race of deceivers" in the early Church, who are compared to Isis searching for the mangled bits of Osiris. Though this implies Milton espoused the concept of an original truth scattered by false prophets, the use to which he puts the Isis allegory is political: he recommends "schisms and sects" as a way to find the scattered parts, as against those who seek to impose a "forc't and outward union of cold and neutrall and inwardly divided minds" (*Areopagitica* 30, [PM 318–19, YP 2:551]).

[47] Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, pp. 304–5.

[48] Discussed below, chap. 11. See now the intelligent presentation by A. D. Nuttall, *The Alternative Trinity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 10–21, 83.

[49] The social atmosphere and the widespread culture of questioning Christian ideas in late antiquity can be gauged from the marvellous description by Gregory of Nyssa. He complains of slaves who have run away from some handicraft a day or two ago and come out as self-taught dogmatic theologians, who talk impressively about incomprehensible matters:

> Everywhere in the city is full of it, the alleyways, the streets, the squares; the men who sell clothes, the money-changers, the food-sellers. If you ask about the rate of exchange, you get a lecture on the Created and the Uncreated. You ask the price of a loaf of bread, and you are told by way of reply that the Father is superior, the Son subordinate. You inquire whether the public bath is a convenient one, and he replies that the Son was made out of nothing.

(Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 46, as quoted in *The New York Review of Books*, 15 June 2000, p. 69, a review by Jasper Griffin of *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World*, ed. G. W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar (Cambridge: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 2000).

world of matter: his is the story told in Genesis. In another, even more influential Gnostic system, the one that developed from the thinking of Mani, the dark or evil god was of separate origin from the good, and cosmic history was simply one long struggle between the two.[50] These views, with many minor variants, had enormous impact on the developing Christian system, both because it incorporated some of them directly, and because it invented ways to oppose them. Augustine, the most influential of all the Fathers of the Church, was himself a Manichaean for nine years, and his later thinking hesitates about the origin of evil as he tries to understand the words of the Bible: at one point he takes the idea that the Devil "was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there was no truth in him" (John 8.44) to be the correct view; at another he recalls Ezekiel 28.15, "Thou wast perfect in thy ways till iniquity was found in thee." Like many before him, Augustine took this passage about the prince of Tyre to be a reference to the fall of the angels from heaven, an apocryphal narrative with thin biblical support.

So did the Devil, or didn't he, enjoy the blessed life of an angel before he fell? The issue was important, since if the John text was right, it would imply that the Devil had been created a murderer and a liar, and that would impute the creation of evil to God, a conclusion Christians have generally tried to avoid. Augustine vacillated, but eventually the Ezekiel text won out and he went to extraordinary linguistic contortions to reveal the true meaning of John's dangerously loose choice of words. The outline of a narrative Augustine constructed in this way, and bequeathed to the medieval Church, is eventually presented as a commentary on Genesis 1.3 about the separation of the light from the darkness on the second day.[51] One day made all the difference from the Manichaean heresy.

Milton made various uses of these revealing heresies—revealing because of what they tell about mainstream Christianity, and Milton's suspicions of it. He uses Satan as a critique of views he found unacceptable, such as those that denied the importance of freedom ("necessity, the Tyrant's plea"), or those that thought of other "Persons" as equal to God: for Milton, who thought the Trinity so much mumbo-jumbo, the Son was inferior, and arguing for his equality was like arguing there were two gods, not one.[52] This conflict he

[50] The Manichaean adversary could be known variously as the Darkness, Hyle, Ahriman, or Iblis. See below, chap. 6.

[51] The key passages are *De Genesi ad litteram* 11.16, and *City of God* 11.14; see Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, pp. 15, 428–34.

[52] "The numerical significance of 'one' and of 'two' must be unalterable and the same for God as for man. It would have been a waste of time for God to thunder forth so repeatedly that first commandment which said that he was the one and only God, if it could nevertheless be maintained that another God existed as well, who ought himself to be thought of as the only God. Two distinct things cannot be of the same essence. God is one being, not two." (YP 6.212.) The anti-Trinitarianism involves Milton in arguing against the plain meaning of John 1.7, *there are three*

dramatizes in his highly original version of Satan's initial disobedience.[53] He also seems to have recognized the connection between Satan and the Gnostic Demiurge, and so Satan and his world become parodies of the Creation—in the Satanic palace to the North, for example, or the building of Pandaemonium as an imitation of Heaven, with artificial lights instead of real, and especially in the meeting with Sin and Death. Sin gives an account of her own birth that recalls that of Athena from the head of Zeus, but also the descriptions of Gnostic cosmogonies Milton read in Irenaeus or Epiphanius. The various copulations and emanations that generate the visible universe as an abhorred prison are heavily satirized by Irenaeus and other Christian apologists as sterile and profane babblings. The Gnostic Sophia, for example, is a kind of divine mother of all, but she manages at first to generate only a blob, like Milton's Death. In one version of the Valentinian Gnostic myth, Sophia perceives that the father generates out of himself without consort, and is spurred by a desire to emulate him. But since such parthenogenesis is the power only of the most high, all she produces is a formless entity. He must remain frustrated and incomplete, unformed, unless the father can give him new life, in the way that Milton's Satan manages to feed Death by finding a continuous source of nourishment for him. Epiphanius presents the Valentinian first creation thus:

> As in the beginning the Self-Father encompassed within himself the All, which rested unconscious in him . . . the Ennoia (Thought) within him, who is also called Grace, . . . once willed to break the eternal bonds, and moved the Greatness to lie with her. And uniting with him she brought forth the Father of Truth, whom the initiated rightly call 'Man', because he is the image of the pre-existent Unbegotten.[54]

The Gnostics who invented these cosmic allegories were working in the Alexandrian tradition that allegorized Greek, Iranian, and Egyptian myths. Similarly, the Greek Father, St. John Chrysostom, told the myth of Scylla's biform body as a moralized version of the state of Sin,[55] a myth that Spenser used for his Error, the type of heresy, self-perpetuating and self-destructive, but not creative. The Gnostic Sophia, or Ennoia, clearly derive from similar allegoriza-

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witnesses in heaven, The Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one" (*De doctrina Christiana*, 1.6, [YP 6.297]). The arguments there are interesting, but it took a Satan to argue them properly.

[53] See chap. 5, below.

[54] Epiphanius, *Haereses*, 31.5.2–3, quoted in Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), p. 180. For the Irenaean version, see *Adversus Haereses*. 1.11. For a different view, see Stephen Fallon, "Milton's Sin and Death: The Ontology of Allegory in *Paradise Lost*", *English Literary Renaissance* 17 (1987): pp. 329–50. See also Turner, *One Flesh*, p. 155.

[55] See Hughes's note at *Paradise Lost* 2.649–60.

tions of Hesiod's myth of the birth of Athena from the head of Zeus (*Theogony* 925–29), and it was easy enough for Milton, perceiving the relationship, to recombine the elements into the macabre humor of Satan's confrontation with himself and his own origins. It was also vital for his theology: Satan may become Evil, a rival principle loose in creation, like Manichaean Darkness, but he originates, within goodness, as Sin, Augustine's answer to Manichaean dualism.

9. *Medieval Heresy*

In the medieval Church, heresy scares continued to provoke central authority, both papal and imperial, to rigorous denunciations of the Devil and so to reinforcement of their own power. On 4 November 1184, Pope Lucius III issued a blacklist of heretics, and a new political understanding with the emperor left the red-bearded Frederick I to carry out the resulting executions. So began one of the bloodiest periods in the history of a bloody Church, the persecution and eradication of a range of heretics including the Patarines, the Poor Men of Lyon or Waldensians (Vaudois), followers of Peter Waldo circa 1173, the Brethren of the Free Spirit, Taborites, and the Cathars or Albigensians. Though the sects were often quite different one from another, wandering mendicants dedicated to a life of poverty and purity (and therefore often opposed to the increasing wealth of the established Church) disseminated their ideas and practices throughout Europe. Often the moral purity was linked to Gnostic mythologies, to the extent that abstinence from sex was a way of defeating the iniquitous Demiurge who ruled the body and tried to keep the spirit imprisoned within. Bogomil missionaries from Bulgaria, for example, brought their revived forms of Gnostic dualism into northern Italy from the 1140s. For them Satanael was the elder son, but rebelled and was cast out by God. Like the Gnostic Demiurge, he then created a rival world for himself, which is the one we live in. Eventually God produced the younger brother, the Son, and sent Christ/Michael to earth to let men know about their true condition. Christ/Michael defeats Satanael, and returns to heaven to take Satanael's former place at the right hand of God. This is a typical Gnostic myth, picturing salvation as an incursion from outside the created world, and no doubt the Bogomil version found other variants surviving from the earlier Middle Ages with which to join forces.[56]

[56] See the useful summary in Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Lucifer* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 43–49, 185–90, and more generally Milan Loos, *Dualist Heresy in the Middle Ages* (Prague: Akademia Press, 1974). For important caveats, see R. I. Moore, "The Inquisitor's nightmare," the *Times Literary Supplement*, 9 Feb. 2001, pp. 10–11. In the same years, a new and related focus in art on the Last Judgment, in which the souls of the dead are divided into saved and damned, led to renewed representations of the Devil as the ruler of Hell, sometimes sharing the task of weighing the dead souls with Michael. From the eleventh-century Torcello mosaics or the

The impact of such heresies persisted into Milton's time. Indeed, radical Protestantism was nurtured on them.[57] They shared millennial expectations, insistence on moral purity (though not without curious forms of eroticism, as in the Adam cult that claimed to restore a lost Paradise and its nudity,[58] prominent among the Ranters), an impulse to translate and disseminate the Bible, along with the itinerant preaching that often accompanied it, and a suspicion of priestly power. William Tyndale is only one among many a Protestant influenced by such medieval "heretics." The Waldensian movement was savagely put down, yet again, by the Duke of Savoy in 1655, an incident that inspired one of Milton's most powerful sonnets, "Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints." But perhaps more significant, the importance given to the Devil within such dualist heresies as the Cathar helped increase the sense of his power even within the world of orthodoxy. Milton was sympathetic to heresy, recognizing its views as often more original than those of the orthodox: indeed a radical Protestant would find it difficult to justify any other position, given that Luther and Calvin were themselves the exemplary heretics.

10. *Old English* Genesis *to Chaucer*

Milton read the heresiologists carefully, and makes plentiful use of them. And it is clear he read the basic texts from more than one point of view. On the one hand, as Eve's dream narrative shows, he could acknowledge the power of the Devil to produce diabolical illusions, even to tell convincing fictions as Satan does in Eve's fantasy. On the other hand, the sympathy with the Devil is strong: he knew, as we have seen, that what the Church often ascribed to the Devil was "the truer opinion." The sympathy has many potential sources, but one may be his knowledge of certain medieval narratives.

The story of Satan had continued to develop in the Middle Ages, and one of the more interesting possibilities is that Milton knew, or knew of, the Old English poems edited and published by his acquaintance, the Dutch scholar

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illuminations of the Winchester Psalter to the great cathedral sculptures at Autun (c. 1130) by Gislebertus and then Chartres or Bourges, the iconography increasingly suggests both a powerful Christ-figure as judge, and a correspondingly central Satan in the lower world. Many of those consigned to his realm must, in the logic of *orthodox* theology, have been already working for him in the world above. Splendid illustrations of most of these works are to be found in Luther Link, *The Devil*, pp. 91–114. For a coherent account, see Peter Klein, "The Apocalypse in Medieval Art," in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 173–96.

[57] Janel Mueller, "Milton on Heresy," in Dobranski, *Milton and Heresy*, pp. 21–38, focuses on *A Treatise of Civil Power*. No one in the book, unfortunately, treats the Waldensian massacre. A congregation of these "Vaudois" still worships in the Geneva Auditoire where Calvin and Knox preached, and which Milton must have visited while he was staying with the Diodati family.

[58] Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 180–81.

Franciscus Junius, in Amsterdam in 1654.[59] Here in *Christ and Satan*, *Genesis A*, but especially *Genesis B*, we meet for the first time a Satan of epic stature, but also of Teutonic defiance, a rebellious retainer who refuses to serve and imagines he can become just like God, who thinks he can establish his own *dryht* in heaven. Also for the first time we find complete narratives—presented as such rather than as disguised theology—that, as Russell puts it, "firmly set the rebellion and fall of the angels, which the Old Testament omits entirely, into the Genesis story."[60]

The biblical source, already exploited by Origen and Tertullian to fill in the picture of the Devil's rebellion,[61] is Isaiah 14.12–15, in which the king of Babylon is addressed as a defeated rebel. This passage, the origin of the name Lucifer, has been seen as an ironic use of the myth-language typical of the Jews' opponents among the surrounding peoples, although I think the irony works against the addressee, not his culture. The language of the passage is typical of biblical poetry, with its self-contained verses each repeated in a different key:

> How are you fallen from heaven,
> Shining One, son of Dawn!
> How are you felled to earth,
> Conqueror of the nations!
> You said in your heart:
> "I will ascend to heaven
> Above the stars of El.
> I will set my throne on high,
> I will sit enthroned
> On the mount of assembly,
> On the recesses of Zaphon [in the far north].
> I will ascend upon the high clouds,
> I will become like Elyon."

Verse 12 contains the reference to *Hêlēl ben Šaḥar* (Helel ben Shahar), "Shining one, Son of the Dawn", loosely translated in the Septuagint, the Greek Bible, as *Heōsphoros*, dawn-bringer, and by Jerome's Latin as *Lucifer*. A Canaanite "original" of this myth has been uncovered by archaeology in the Athtar narrative, but it is also cognate with the "prince of Tyre" episode in Ezekiel, and

[59] Revard, *War in Heaven*, p. 143, briefly reviews the discussion over whether Milton knew the poem. But see especially J. Martin Evans, *Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), pp. 143–67. Michael Alexander, *Old English Literature* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1983), pp. 99–101, cites the note in Milton's Trinity manuscript calling Bede's tale of Caedmon *perplacida historiola* and reminds us that Caedmon was thought to be the author of the Genesis poems.

[60] Russell, *Lucifer*, p. 138.

[61] Revard, *War in Heaven*, pp. 34–42, is a fine discussion.

the Greek Phaethon.[62] In the Church Fathers like Origen and Tertullian, the myth is already being put to both quasi– and anti-Gnostic uses.

The Old English poems add a great deal of feudal color, including long and sometimes moving speeches by the Devil to his thanes: it would be better, he laments in *Christ and Satan*, if I had never known the brightness of heaven, which now is all given over to God's Son. "Alas that I am deprived of eternal joy" (167). In *Genesis B*, the poet says that "mighty God . . . cast him into torment, down to that bed of death, and afterwards gave him a name; He said that the highest should thenceforth be called Satan" (343–45). It had evidently now become part of conventional doctrine that the bright angel Lucifer became Satan on his fall from heaven, and here he is called both.[63] The Middle English *Cursor Mundi* states explicitly that "his name chaunged was / Fro Lucifere to Sathanas" (479–80), and Chaucer's Monk laments:

> O Lucifer, brightest of angels alle,
> Now artow Sathanas, that mayst nat twynne
> Out of miserie, in which that thou art falle.
>
> (2004–6)[64]

But it is not in naming or in doctrine that *Genesis B* is remarkable, but in narrative power—and in particular in its characterization of Satan. Translating an Old Saxon (Low German) poem, perhaps of the ninth century—which accounts for its difference from the surrounding texts, but not for its peculiar excellence—*Genesis B* is inserted abruptly into the manuscript that contains the other poems. And whereas *Genesis A* gives God's version of what happened, denouncing Satan's pride and displaying God's anger, and in *Christ and Satan*, Satan admits that his pride led to his fall and he cannot expect any better than Hell as a result, *Genesis B* cuts the moralizing and gives the Satanic viewpoint clearly. Imagining himself to have more might and craft than God, he stirs up strife like a rebellious thane against his chief: "I need no lord. I can work equal wonders with my own hands, so why must I pay homage?" The challenge is to the entire political system. Enraged, God hurls him out and into Hell. Assembling the other fallen angels, Lucifer-Satan insists God "has not done right," nor "can he accuse us of any sin." He conceives a plan of revenge, to make Adam and Eve transgress God's will. Their downfall is wrought not through greed or lust, but simply because the serpent appears as God's messenger. As such he approaches not Eve but Adam, as lord and master; Adam declines on the grounds he has not seen an angel-messenger like this before. The serpent then persuades Eve to eat by appealing to her love for

[62] Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, pp. 134–39.

[63] Leonard, *Naming*, p. 89. In *Paradise Lost*, on the other hand, Satan's former name is heard no more (5.659, cf. 1.361–5); see Leonard, *Naming*, pp. 90–145, and ad loc 5.658.

[64] Fred Robinson, ed., *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), p. 189.

Adam, and when Eve persuades Adam to eat the apple it is "out of loyal intent." In this poem, there is no guilt, no reproaches from the other angels. Instead, says Satan's first lieutenant, "God grew angry with us because we refused to bow our heads to him, because we could not accept ministering to him in vassalage." It is perhaps hard for us to imagine how much this kind of claim must have sounded like a call to the barricades. But this Satan insists God has wronged him: "He is unjust and I defy him."[65] It is hard to believe that Milton did not know the poem.

At any rate it is clear that the two poems share the central importance of obedience (*thegnscipe*) and thus of rebellion, and that in both cases the concepts have direct political relevance. The Old Saxon and Old English poems incorporate the Teutonic concepts of lordship (Old English *hlaford*, bread-giver) and mutual loyalty, rather than the Latin notion of *dominus*, which suggests the absolute power of a Roman (whether Holy or not) emperor. The distinction is important if one is to grasp the social and psychological aspect of Satan's grievance, which is not fully explained in the poem. The essence of the wrong committed by Satan, and by Adam, was to violate the trust of their *dryhten*, but he, the lord, should in return have respected the rights of his *comitatus*, the band of thanes who agree to follow their war-leader. Similarly the pope may be the chief of the Church, but he is also the *servus servorum*. These Teutonic concepts fit with, but colored, the inherited ideas of sin and punishment. If sin is the disruption of the *dryht*, then the punishment is the dreaded exile, to be cut off from one's lord and to wander without a protector, *hlafordleas*, a literal outlaw.

Paradise Lost certainly echoes the rebel of Isaiah 14 at key moments. The first reference to the revolt of Satan occurs early, when the narrator tells us (1.38–41) that "aspiring / To set himself in Glory above his Peers, / He trusted to have equal'd the most High / If he oppos'd." Satan's first words to his companion recall the prophet's: "But O how fall'n! how chang'd / From him, Who in the happy Realms of Light / Cloth'd with transcendent brightness didst out-shine / Myriads though bright" (1.84–87). This will remind an astute reader that Lucifer means "light-bearer." The name itself is used when, during the first stages of the revolt, Satan withdraws to the North (5.689), to the Mount of Congregation (5.732, 766), and builds his citadel, "The Palace of great *Lucifer*" (5.760). Raphael repeats the name later, again alluding explicitly to Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28: "Know then, that after *Lucifer* from heav'n / (So call him, brighter once amidst the Host / Of Angels, then that Starr the

[65] "The Junius Manuscript," in *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, vol. 1, ed. George Philip Krapp (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931); translations in this discussion are my own. For analysis, see J. M. Evans, "*Genesis B* and Its Background," *Review of English Studies* 14 (1963): 1–16, 113–23, partly reworked in Paradise Lost *and The Genesis Tradition*, pp. 143–67.

Starrs among) / Fell (7.131–34)—one of the poem's more resonant, because syntactically delayed, uses of the word "fell."[66] None of this is necessarily filtered through *Genesis B*. Yet the plot of the early books, the powerful conception of the rebellious Satan, and the buried sense of a political resonance in a world that had lived through a civil war and the deposition of the monarch, all make plausible Milton's sympathetic knowledge of the medieval poem.

11. *Satan's Rebellion*

We shall consider in a separate chapter Milton's version of the rebellion—it is one of many things that make his story of origins so refreshing. Anti-God critics like Empson have made a lot of it, while the more orthodox commentators have minimized it: in his admittedly brief summary of Satan's career in the *Milton Encyclopedia*, for example, Robert M. Fallon does not mention it. Though the episode has important subtexts, perhaps including *Genesis B*, it is Milton's invention: it is not in the Bible, at least not obviously, and it is not in Milton's own treatise on the Bible, the *De doctrina Christiana* (where Satan figures very little). Thus Milton did not feel himself to be restricted to explicit references to Satan. It is an interesting case of how he used the scriptures, as well as the rebellion episodes of traditional belief.

God is indeed autocratic in the exaltation scene that gives rise to Satan's revolt. In Milton's new-old myth, the angels are summoned to hear God appointing the Son their head, arbitrarily ordering them to worship him and to "abide / United as one individual Soule" (5.609–10). At the very moment the command is given to stay united comes the division into two, the broken union, and hence the origin of Satan, and so perhaps of evil. Authoritarian rulers have a lot to answer for in Milton.

Satan's reaction to this speech, as the epic voice tells us reprovingly, is envy and pride together:[67] he

> fraught
> With envie against the Son of God, that day
> Honourd by his great Father, and proclaimd
> *Messiah* King anointed, could not beare
> Through pride that sight, & thought himself impaird.
>
> (PL 5.661–65)

Satan's first move then is to be "against the Son of God" and Milton expects us to remember the generic meaning of his name: the "Arch-Enemy, / And

[66] See Leonard's discussion of Raphael's simile at 5.746, "Starrs of Night, / Or Starrs of Morning, Dew-drops," and *Naming*, p. 91. Revard, *War in Heaven*, p. 70, points out that the *De doctrina Christiana* makes no reference to either Isaiah 14 or Ezekiel 28 among the texts cited to elucidate Satan's character and history. But Luther did, e.g., at *Works* 22.103.

[67] Revard, *War in Heaven*, pp. 67–107.

thence in Heav'n call'd Satan" (5.81–82). At 10.386–87, Satan himself acknowledges the meaning of the name as "Antagonist of Heav'ns Almightie King."

If Milton did not simply invent his own variant of the story, he may have read it into (or out of) the Scripture that he makes God quote. Let us recall his delight in reading Scripture (as well as Hesiod) for the buried subtexts as well as the overt meanings. God's key phrase, "This day I have begotten thee," occurs first in Psalm 2.6–7, whence it is quoted in several New Testament texts. One of these is the basis of God's inaugural speech in *Paradise Lost*, the first chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews, which also adds the common quotation of Psalm 110.1: "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool" (see Hebrews 1.5, 13). There, in a nutshell, is the enthronement of the Son.

For Milton, the quotation from Psalm 2 was especially important, since the Protestant reformers took Psalm 2.6–9 as the basic promise of all Scripture: Calvin took it as God's solemn decree of the kingdom and Luther as the "highest article of our faith."[68] With good reason, then, Milton based on it the key scene of the poem, the origin of Satan as Satan. And in keeping with his polemical method in his biblical interpretation, he gives a new and challenging reading of the passage. But he allows us, indeed encourages us, to discover the original text beneath the poem. And when we do so, we realize how much closer came Milton than Hesiod to making his God the rebel or the new king. For Psalm 2.1–9 is an announcement by the king that he is adopting a new and powerful "son" in order to put down a serious challenge to his power. That is why Milton's god sounds as if he is evoking a rebellion against his decree, since in the psalm the rebellion was already taking place, and God responds to it. God already has enemies—just as in Isaiah 14. As chapter 5 will argue, the decree in Book 5 is almost nakedly what Psalm 2 in fact is, a threat that the new king will prove the stronger.

Almost, but not quite. Instead what results from the confrontation and battle is the discovery of a new sense of self. Milton moves the epic genre further towards modernity, and makes the discovery overlap with the Satanic voyage to the interior, and the sense of inner loss. Milton's Satan has several important phases of self-discovery or self-fashioning before he becomes simply the enemy of mankind. The first is when he becomes aware of himself as other, during the revolt and the build-up to the War in Heaven; that is, when he realizes he cannot applaud the values that result in the Son being promoted above him. Milton stresses this important step towards his new self by inventing an intense confrontation between Abdiel, the single angel who "maintaind / Against revolted multitudes the Cause / of Truth" (6.30–32), and the newly revolted Satan. In his reply to Abdiel's challenge, Satan suddenly finds himself

[68] Georgia Christopher, *Science of the Saints*, pp. 90–91.

insisting that, by his "own quick'ning power," he and the rest are all "self-begot, self-rais'd" (5.860–61). This is exactly what various Gnostic demiurges claim—in ignorance, as the heresiologists hastily add. Ironically, Satan, too, justifies the claim by insisting on ignorance: "We know no time when we were not as now; / Know none before us."

The poem makes two comments on this claim. One is God's: the rebels are "Self-tempted, self-deprav'd" (3.130), rather than self-created; the second, even better, is Satan's admission, in the privacy of the Niphates soliloquy that it was God who created him (4.43). But by then, in a sense, it is already too late. That is a further, and even more important, step in Satan's voyage into the self. He can't get out again. The revolt has become Satan's new definition of himself, and he cannot go back. Setting out to conquer a new world on Earth, he in fact discovers a new world within, and that world remains Hell.

12. *Warfare and Imperialism*

Whatever he owes to medieval predecessors, then, this interior and troubled dimension of Satan makes him a product of the early modern world. He is so resolute in his determination to explore this dangerous consciousness that, in this respect, he is the perfect image, extended and expanded from Marlowe, of what is genuinely Faustian about the risk the Renaissance took. "Alone, and without guide, half-lost" (2.975), Satan nonetheless

> Springs upward like a Pyramid of fire
> Into the wilde expanse, and through the shock
> Of fighting Elements, on all sides round
> Environ'd wins his way; harder beset
> And more endanger'd, then when *Argo* pass'd
> Through *Bosporus* betwixt the justling Rocks:
> Or when *Ulysses* on the Larbord shunnd
> *Charybdis*, and by th' other whirlpool steard.
>
> (PL 2.1013–20)

He strikes out into new areas of space and time, like Jason or Odysseus, but also like Vasco da Gama or Columbus into a sea that no one has ever crossed before; into a new Church without the sanctions of Rome and priesthood and tradition (Luther); into the strange world revealed within the telescopic mirrors (Galileo); and into the unknown region of the dreaming and reflecting self (Descartes), perhaps also into studies of depth perspective in art and in scientific drawing (Leonardo); into a politics beyond the supposedly divine right of kings (Machiavelli, Winstanley); into poetic freedom and indeterminacy (Milton on his "flying steed unrein'd", 7.17)[69]—all beyond the place where he

[69] Stevie Davies, *Milton* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991) p. 98, well takes this

has any secure anchorage, and where the space may be endless, the depth bottomless. It is the association of all this with Hell (or at least with Chaos), with what is Godless or forbidden or beyond redemption, that made the Miltonic images exemplary of a period and a whole cultural shift.[70]

The poem views from various angles this Renaissance sense of difference that Satan embodies. Take the genre itself. It has been argued that the epic takes on its complete form for the European tradition only when Vergil inscribed on the shield of Aeneas the battle of Actium between Caesar Octavian (Augustus) and Antony-Cleopatra, and so transformed a "recent history of civil strife into a war of foreign conquest."[71] In Homer's war, both sides are part of the same culture: the Trojans are oddly Greek, and belong to the same world. But Vergil turned the enemy within into the foreigner, the other, against whom all struggle was legitimate. (Romance, by contrast, would be the genre that converts one's enemy into another knight like oneself, sharing the same values and weapons.)[72]

Milton moves the genre even further toward modernity, since Satan's recognition of his difference from the other angels is marked by the extraordinary decision to have Satan invent gunpowder and artillery, to have warfare itself pass from the heroic code of the ancient and medieval worlds to the logistical battles of the modern world, where what wins is not courage but "superior firepower," where the enemy is always other and depersonalized, even demonized, and where the "cock-up" theory of history becomes the most plausible. This new sense of Satanic danger, of a world gotten out of hand, pervades the

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as the image of "a power not susceptible of perfect conscious control; the instability of language available to the aberrant fallen consciousness, with its rich capacity for fabrication and fanciful invention, makes every act of writing potentially fallacious." See for these adventures Isabel MacCaffrey, "Satan's Voyage," in Paradise Lost *as "Myth"* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959).

[70] See discussion of the widespread folktale or seamen's yarn of the Sinbad-like figure who drops anchor on what he thinks is an island, only to find it is "that Sea-beast Leviathan," a simile for Satan "chain'd on the burning Lake" at 1.200–210 in Christopher Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. 6–16. In the sources the seaman usually drowned, as in *The Whale*, an Old English allegorical poem in the *Bestiary* of the *Physiologus*, or in the Norwegian cartographers Milton may also have in mind, see Flannagan (RM, p. 420), Hughes and Fowler ad loc. Note that in the Sinbad collection (not known to Milton, of course) the sailor survives. Ariosto has a similar tale at *Orlando Furioso* 6.37.

[71] David Quint, *Epic and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 23; the point is brilliantly elaborated by Richard Waswo, *The Founding Legend of Western Civilization: From Virgil to Vietnam* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1997). But see also Quint, p. 80, where he argues that the latter part of the *Aeneid* reverses the ideology of the shield scene, and shows the war of conquest as in fact a civil war.

[72] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp. 118–19. Quint, 249, sees the contrast rather differently and in structural terms: epic moves toward a predetermined end, whereas romance is open-ended and potentially endless. Epic is also aristocratic, romance bourgeois.

poem: even in Paradise, when Satan is "Discoverd and surpriz'd" (4.811–13) by the "Touch of Celestial temper" (Ithuriel's spear), he starts up like a sudden explosion of carelessly treated gunpowder,

> As when a spark
> Lights on a heap of nitrous Powder, laid
> Fit for the Tun som Magazin to store
> Against a rumord Warr, the Smuttie graine
> With sudden blaze diffus'd, inflames the Aire.
> So started up in his own shape the Fiend.
>
> (PL 4.814–19)

The language of the simile is intensely and accurately alive: "Tun" and "Smuttie" are locally exact, the vowels move through the mouth to explode in the open *a*'s of line 818.

If this invention suggests the way in which Milton moved the Iliadic genre beyond itself (and so towards its end), the poem also moves the Odyssean type into new and contemporary worlds. Once again the move is part of Satan's development, and eventually is brought into parallel with the reader's experience. Satan's self-discovery continues when he undertakes his great voyage of exploration and conquest, joining the line of heroic wanderers from ancient epic who by now (as in Tasso or Camões)[73] overlapped with the European colonists, out to expand his empire in new worlds he has only dimly heard about. This is obvious during the voyage through chaos itself, in Book 2, with its several explicit references to classical epic heroes, but when Satan arrives on earth, the goal of his voyage, his first reaction, at the beginning of the Niphates speech, is hatred, and self-hatred. He sees the sun, and it reminds him of himself, or rather of what he is no longer. He hates its beams because they "bring to my remembrance from what state / I fell, how glorious once above thy Spheare" (4.37–39). This internal division within Satan is part of his constitution of himself as different, even, indeed especially, from his former self. At its most intense it is love that flips to hate. And it is hatred that gives him

[73] The reference to "the wealth of Ormus and of Ind" (2.2), far outshone by Satan's "Throne of Royal State," is often held to be an allusion to Camões, who told of the glories of Vasco da Gama's Portuguese conquest in the wealthy Orient. See James H. Sims, "Camoens 'Lusiads' and Milton's 'Paradise Lost': Satan's Voyage to Eden," in Philip M. Griffith and Lester F. Zimmerman, eds. *Papers on Milton* (Tulsa: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), pp. 36–45. Ormuz was an island in the Persian Gulf that provided the Portuguese with control of the East-West trade by both land and sea. Several ironies are involved: the opulence of "the gorgeous East," as Milton calls it in the next line, had been suspect in Western literature since Herodotus, and coupling it with "Royal State" suggests a lot of what Milton despised. The island had been recaptured by the Persians, with English help, in 1622, and had lapsed into a barren salt desert, which suggests what may become of Satan's imperial pretensions, now in their height. The ruined mount of Paradise is to be washed into the same Gulf at 11.829–35.

the strength to continue in this new identity. From now on, everything and everyone he sees, however tempted he is at first, must become other.

Thus when Satan arrives in the new world of Eden he behaves like those Renaissance explorers who penetrated and violated the virgin territories of the Americas, but who also looked in wonder on what they saw. He "melts" at the "harmless innocence" of Adam and Eve, so different from what he is, but is nonetheless compelled by "public reason juste" to conquer this new world, which "else though damnd I should abhorre" (4.388–92). But that public reason includes not only the imperialist's standard appeal to "Honour and Empire": it also echoes the dispossessed natives' sense of outrage. He and his followers have been cast out from their "native seat" (1.634), so it is only right for them to avenge themselves on the newcomers "by our exile / Made happie" (10.484–85).[74]

What predominates is the sense of loss. At the moment of the discovery of their nakedness, Adam and Eve are compared to native Americans as they look for leaves:

> vain Covering if to hide
> Thir guilt and dreaded shame; O, how unlike
> To that first naked Glorie. Such of late
> *Columbus* found th' *American* so girt
> With featherd Cincture, naked else and wilde,
> Among the Trees on Iles and woodie Shores.
>
> (PL 9.1113–18)

In this passage, Maureen Quilligan argues, along with commentators such as Flannagan (RM, n. 315, p. 619), that

> we remain in ambiguity, before the sentence finally resolves itself, [and] we assume that the American is indeed unfallen, and therefore *like* that first naked innocence. In this understanding it is then Columbus, fully clothed, who inhabits the quintessential fallen perspective, and who stands confronting the American as if the discoverer were himself a Satanic character—just as we first see Adam and Eve's nakedness through Satan's eyes.[75]

I am not so sure about the ambivalence of the Indians here: the simile seems to me clearly to align them with the fallen Adam and Eve, girt with leaves, no longer innocent, unlike that first naked "Glorie."

At any rate, Satan goes through various stages in his relation to humans, and to the reader. He first discovers his difference from his own kind, the

[74] J. Martin Evans, *Milton's Imperial Epic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 105. The book thoroughly develops these and other parallels.

[75] Maureen Quilligan, "Freedom, service, and the trade in slaves: the problem of labor in *Paradise Lost*," in *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, ed. Margreta de Grazia, Maureen Quilligan, and Peter Stallybrass (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 229.

angels, in internal exile or division, and then he becomes the first colonist, that representative figure of the early modern period who establishes the rest of the world as alien. In the above passage, arguably the reader simply replaces him, sadly to mark his success. And each step is measured by that hatred that is the defining characteristic of the Satanic self. First he hates the sun's beams because it reminds him of who he was, and then, in his reactions to Adam and Eve, he recognizes how he could have loved them, but in practice their happiness makes them a "sight hateful, sight tormenting" (4.505). Finally, in the temptation sequence, he recovers himself from his "Stupidly good" reverie (9.465), and soon "Fierce hate he recollects" (9.471), so giving himself the strength needed to pursue his prey.

13. *Elizabethan Drama*

Apart from classical epic and Christian myth, apart from Reformation theologians and their biblical proof-texts, the most important influence on Milton's Satan was the dramatic tradition. The early sketches in the Trinity Manuscript for what became *Paradise Lost*, when he was still thinking of it as a tragedy not an epic, show Milton thinking along the lines of the medieval morality plays (which, unlike the mysteries, continued to lead a half-life well into the seventeenth century): he peoples his draft with allegorical characters like Justice, Mercie, Labour, Ignorance. These jottings, which are also reminiscent of Greek tragedy in their use of the chorus and their five-act structure, are usually dated to 1640–42. According to Edward Phillips, Milton's nephew, he was still thinking of a tragedy a few years later ("several Years before the Poem was begun"), and Phillips even quotes the first ten lines of Satan's Niphates speech as having been "designed for the very beginning of the said Tragedy."[76]

Milton was no doubt thinking especially of Marlowe's Protestant morality play, *Doctor Faustus*, the hero of which, like Luther and Hamlet, is from Wittenberg, and which seems to be quoted more than once. During the initiating war, for example, when Satan addresses the Michael with whom he is about to fight, he boasts they will win, "Or turn this Heav'n it self into the Hell / Thou fablest" (6.291–92), which recalls the bravado of Faustus's "I think Hell's a fable" (A text, II i 130); and, more obviously, the great speech of self-exploration and self-accusation that Satan makes on Mount Niphates at the beginning of Book 4 reworks the language of Marlowe. "Which way I flie is Hell; my self am Hell / And in the lowest deep a lower deep / Still threatning to devour me opens wide" (4.75–77). Narrator (4.20–23) and Satan both equate the inner depth of the Renaissance self with Hell. But it is especially the reproachful, tortured, Baroque quality of the introspection that shows the link with Elizabethan drama, and which makes so many readers find them-

[76] Helen Darbishire, ed., *The Early Lives of Milton* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932), p. 72.

selves in Satan. Adam and Eve, too, soon discover that troubled "depth" we expect in tragic literature.

The other kind of medieval drama, known as the mystery play, long suppressed, which enacted scenes from Scripture and the Apocrypha, such as the fall of Lucifer or the temptation of Adam and Eve, had also carried on an important tradition. It is conceivable that the young Shakespeare, aged eleven, had gone over from Stratford to see one of the last performances of the Coventry Cycle at Kenilworth, the home of the Earl of Leicester, in 1575.[77] If so, he would have seen the rebellion of Lucifer enacted and watched him engage in a dialogue with Deus. In any case, Shakespeare reproduced this story often enough, though in secular contexts; he was clearly fascinated by rebellious challenges to the throne. In fact, from the time of the Norman Conquest, the English throne had been usurped three times (by John, by Henry IV, by Richard III), and Shakespeare dramatized all three. And when he stopped exploring it in English history, he followed a few months later (1599) with *Julius Caesar*, a key play in that the audience can't tell whether the central character, at one of the defining moments of world history, is the best or the worst of men.[78] This characteristic Shakespearean ambivalence continues into the other tragedies like *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. And it was clearly exploited by Milton for his Satan.[79] For the rebellion itself, Milton surely imitates the wounded pride of the Shakespearean aristocrat faced with the success of another, when the favor of the king is turned elsewhere.

The language of Satan's rebellion is intermittently both Marlovian and Shakespearean, in the intimate moments ("Sleepst thou Companion dear?"; 5.673)[80], in the conspiracy ("more in this place / To utter is not safe"; 5.683–84) and in his public rhetoric, both in Heaven and in Hell.[81] Indeed the first reaction among the angels to God's inaugural proclamation is to introduce that characteristic Shakespearean theme, the difference of "seeming" and "being," but with a typically Miltonic shift to a halting rhythm:

> So spake th' Omnipotent, and with his words
> All seemd well pleas'd, all seem'd, but were not all.
>
> (PL 5.616–17)

[77] Honor Matthews, "The Usurped Throne and the Ambiguous Hero," reprinted in *Shakespeare: Henry V. A Casebook*, ed. Michael Quinn (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1969), p. 202.

[78] Norman Rabkin, *Shakespeare and the Common Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), pp. 105–21.

[79] The key study is Helen Gardner, "Milton's Satan and the Theme of Damnation in Elizabethan Tragedy," *English Studies*, N.S. 1 (1948): 46–66, reprinted in her *A Reading of Paradise Lost* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. 99–120. See more generally Richard S. Ide, "On the uses of Elizabethan Drama: the Revaluation of Epic in *Paradise Lost*," *Milton Studies* 17 (1983): pp. 121–40.

[80] The precedents for this scene are all epic, as Leonard shows with a useful list ad loc, and it echoes the voices that rouse heroes from sleep in order to lure them into rash or adventurous acts; but Milton's language, it seems clear to me, is borrowed from the drama.

[81] See Flannagan (RM, n. 201, p. 497) for comment on *Richard III*.

The Shakespearean language even infects God, once the rebellion has begun:

> Let us advise, and to this hazard draw
> With speed what force is left, and all imploy
> In our defence, lest unawares we lose
> This our high place, our Sanctuarie, our Hill.
>
> (PL 5.729–32)

God suddenly finds himself, as Swardson puts it, "speaking the language of a beleagered monarch in Shakespeare's history plays. 'Hazard' suggests chance,"[82] which is impossible for God, we must suppose, as is the further suggestion that omniscience could be caught unawares. Nonetheless, such is the power of the Shakespearean model, that it makes Milton risk theological absurdity—though he soon recovers by implying that God was joking.[83]

14. *Politics*

Of course Milton did not need Shakespeare to know about politics. In some measure the revolt in Book 5 must reflect Milton's own strong feelings about rebellion, since he had himself been an enthusiastic supporter of, and leading figure in, the English Revolution against the King, the established Church, and a corrupt political system, though not primarily against the universe. One might expect, then, that some of his political sympathies would exert themselves in Satan's cause. It has been argued, for example, that the oppositional politics of Hell, where debate precedes decision, and that reflect both contemporary pamphlets and the actual style of English politics, even the public quarrel with Abdiel that follows the initial revolt in Book 5, make better models for fallen mankind, in Milton's view, than the absolute obedience exacted by the ideal monarchy of heaven.[84]

Milton began the writing of *Paradise Lost* during a period of bitter civil strife; he seems to have continued it intermittently during the various triumphs and disappointments of his work for the Republican government or Commonwealth; and he finished it during the aftermath, even more bitter for him, of the Restoration (1660). This was not real peace: foreign wars continued, especially the Dutch Wars, and *Paradise Lost* was first published in the same year, 1667, as a particularly humiliating moment of English history—when the Dutch sailed unmolested up the Medway and burned the English

[82] Harold R. Swardson, *Poetry and the Fountain of Light* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1962), p. 117. Flannagan (RM, n. 210, p. 498), copes with this problem by denying that "hazard" here means chance, as it does when Satan says it: rather it means "danger" or "peril."

[83] The reference is to Psalm 2.4; see Revard, *War in Heaven*, p. 100.

[84] Diana Treviño Benet. "Hell, Satan, and the New Politician," in Benet and Michael Lieb, eds., *Literary Milton: Text, Pretext, Context* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1994), pp. 91–112.

fleet at Chatham. Writers of the period made a great deal of the military dimensions of literature, referring often, if in fairly general terms, to Homeric and Vergilian precedents for martial heroism, and frequently damning their political rivals as devils or followers of Satan.[85] Thus not only the epic background of *Paradise Lost*, but also the Christian context of the New Testament, those quarrels with rival sects and with the Romans, were immediately relevant to daily life. In a very important respect, *Paradise Lost* is about all this. It puts war at the very center of the poem, and a terrible civil war at that, but it bristles elsewhere also with martial imagery, whether in the waving banners and rhythmic marching "to the Dorian mood" of the fallen angels (1.544–88), the *rassemblement* of heavenly angels with their gonfalons and banners prior to God's inaugural speech, or the various agonies of the final books of history. It contains many references coded or explicit to contemporary events and controversies: the Cavalier "Sons / Of *Belial*, flown with insolence and wine" (1.501–2); the Miltonic narrator who has "fall'n on evil dayes, / On evil dayes though fall'n, and evil tongues" (7.25–26) since the Restoration and his imprisonment; or that "fear of change [that] / Perplexes Monarchs" (1.598–99) and almost had the poem destroyed or censored.[86] Satan clomb into Eden like "lewd Hirelings" into God's Church (4.193), where Flannagan thinks Milton is consciously referring readers back to "Lycidas" and to his pamphlet *Considerations Touching the Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings out of the Church*. But beyond specific references like these Milton could not help but write his own time into the poem. Like many of his apocalyptically minded contemporaries, he saw the events of the Christian myth he was retelling as paradigms or archetypes for the daily events of the Civil War. The cosmic struggle and the origins of human sin were the main subjects of the epic, but those events could now be understood in the terms made clear by contemporary politics.

And vice versa. Thus Milton's friend Theodore Haak, who read his German blank-verse translation of *Paradise Lost* to H. L. Benthem in 1687–88, evidently thought of the poem as political. Benthem, at least, gathered from talking to Haak that Milton, "dieser sehr schlau Politicus," this wily politician, concealed under the story of the fall of our first parents a lament for the loss of

[85] James Freeman, *Milton and the Martial Muse* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1980) reviews the literature and establishes connections with Satan. Sharon Achinstein, *Milton and the Revolutionary Reader* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1994) establishes connections with periodical and pamphlet literature. "Sometimes," writes Peter Thomas ("The Impact of Literature," in John Morrill, ed. *The Impact of the English Civil War* [London: Collins and Brown, 1991], p. 127), "the very layout of broadsheets confronts readers with conflict and choice, as when *The Two Incomparable Generalissimos of the World* (Satan and Christ) are drawn up facing us in two vertical columns of verse."

[86] Discussed, in the concluding chapter, below. For the presence of the contemporary civil war, see Robert Fallon, "Michael Murrin's Milton and the 'Epic Without War': A Review essay," *Milton Quarterly* 31 (1997): 119–23.

Republican England at the Restoration.[87] Political interpretation of the poem continued to be common, so that the author of an anonymous 1750 poem could imagine meeting Milton in Hell (where he is condemned for his politics): he admits that "the Devil really was my Hero."[88]

The link between cosmic and contemporary politics is especially obvious in the elaborate and powerful speeches Milton gives to the various participants in the parliamentary debate the devils conduct in Pandaemonium. Though Satan clearly manipulates the meeting, as any canny politician would, there is something insidiously attractive about this open debate and the various freedoms it implies for dissent and collective policy making: in this respect it contrasts not so much with the insipid heavenly dialogue of Book 3, as with God's absolute decree in Book 5, the origin of the rebellion. But for that scene, too, Milton exploits what he must have seen many times (and heard, when he could no longer see): jealousy among fellow leaders, the slighted feelings of one as his rival gains advancement, the effort to redress the balance by convincing his followers to fight with him for the lost privilege. The revolutionary leaders had displayed the same kinds of rationalizing pettiness or heroic selfishness as do the fallen angels. Satan has in him Cromwell as well as Charles.[89]

15. *The Miltonic Moment*

Literary studies increasingly have been divided, either historically or institutionally, from religious studies. But Milton's Satan bridges the gap: he corresponds partly to the figure of religious belief, although he is primarily a character in an epic narrative. Of course, like all characters in literature, Satan is not really "there"—he is absent and only conjured into imagined presence by

[87] See Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1977), pp. 391–92, and the intelligent comments by Cedric C. Brown, *John Milton: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), p. 179. The whole issue is further explored now in John S. King, *Milton and Religious Controversy: Satire and Polemic in* Paradise Lost (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[88] John T. Shawcross, "An Early View of Satan as Hero of *Paradise Lost*," *Milton Quarterly 32* (1998): 104–5. See generally John M. Steadman, "The Idea of Satan as the Hero of *Paradise Lost*," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, CXX (1976), pp. 253–94.

[89] For Satan as Cromwell, see Empson, *Milton's God*, p. 74, Robert Fallon, *Captain or Colonel: the Soldier in Milton's Life* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1984), and idem, *Divided Empire: Milton's Political Imagery* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), p. 23; see also Leonard on 4.393–94, "necessity, the tyrant's plea" ("necessity" as Cromwell's word), and James Freeman, *Martial Muse*, p. 143, comparing Milton's praise of Cromwell in *Second Defence*, emphasizing his self-control, CM 8.215. Richard Bradford, *Paradise Lost* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992), p. 19, also compares Beelzebub's speech with the same passage in which, he says, Milton fulfilled his duties as apologist for the Cromwellian Commonwealth. Joan Bennett aligns Satan with Charles I in *Reviving Liberty: Radical Christian Humanism in Milton's Great Poems* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 33–58. Hill has it both ways in *Milton and the English Revolution*, pp. 367–73.

the reader's activity. I choose these words carefully, for this fascinating parallel between literature and magic allows us to see the importance of the historical moment for Milton's work. Several stories circulated during the period about performances of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. In one especially interesting case, "as Faustus was busy with his magical invocations," the cast of the play suddenly felt as if a mysterious Other had joined them: "there was one devil too many."[90] Everyone was so frightened that they called off the performance, went home quietly and spent the night in prayer—unusual behaviour for actors.

This story suggests that secular theater and religious ritual were still not entirely differentiated, at least in the popular mind. In fact, the right to conjure, to control the mystery by which literary and dramatic inventions can seem to be really present, was an important issue in the political struggles among Church, court, and Parliament, just as the question of Christ's "real presence" during the Mass was very much at issue.

From the time of James I, the monarch exerted more and more direct control over the theater, and when parliament took power from the king in 1642, beginning the Civil War, it closed the theaters. The language of interiority that had been so important an invention of the stage passed now into "literature," and even when the theaters were reopened after the Restoration, there is nothing comparable to what Milton was doing in this private and circumscribed world of poetry, for which he hoped he might "fit audience find, though few" (7.25).

So it was during Milton's lifetime that these issues were fought over and the modern view began to emerge of literature as a separate, secular practice,[91] detached from social institutions and designed for aesthetic or reflective, rather than moral or religious, satisfaction: it is to this emerging view that Satan's interior and personal hell appeals. But this view was still contemporary with another, more traditional notion—the one that required as normal the censorship of literature because of its power to shape and challenge social consciousness. Milton's Satan clearly partakes of both worldviews; indeed this confrontation of ideologies is an important reason for the ambivalence I have tried to illustrate. Milton treats Satan as an object of traditional religious belief, yet, partly as a result of *Paradise Lost*, Satan became henceforward a literary character, to reappear in some of the best-known plays, novels, or romantic poems of the European cultural heritage. The Satan Blake found in Milton, for example, is not a figure of religious belief, but rather a source of poetic energy and imagination, indeed the one *real* source, and his opponents represent the re-

[90] See E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage* Vol. 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923), pp. 423–24.

[91] Michael McKeon, "Politics of Discourse and the Rise of the Aesthetic in Seventeenth-Century England," in *Politics of Discourse*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and Stephen N. Zwicker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 35–51.

pressive world that was coming to be with the Industrial Revolution and that forced, and continues to force, the arts into that separate, marginalized status we know so well. Or, to take a more general example, so compelling is the character of Satan in *Paradise Lost* that generations of English speakers, knowing their Milton better than their Bible, have assumed that Christianity teaches an elaborate story about the fall of the angels after a war in heaven, and have been surprised to find no mention of Satan in the Book of Genesis.

One can say, then, that Milton's Satan was invented at the last possible moment, at the very time when belief in the Devil and the combat myth was in decline, undermined by the new forms of rationalism or liberal religion—or the excesses of the great witch-persecutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Is Hell a place or a psychological state, for example? In *Paradise Lost* it is both: Hell is there, indeed created by God, yet Milton's Satan, echoing Marlowe's Mephistopheles, also says in famous words "Myself am Hell." In Milton the two concepts coexist, but soon a literal Hell would no longer be a respectable object of belief for the educated classes.[92] Indeed in Milton's own theological treatise, *De doctrina Christiana*, written at the same time as *Paradise Lost*, Satan rarely appears. There Milton is more interested in the symbolic and interior aspect signaled by George Herbert when he wrote in "Sinne (II)": "devils are our sins in perspective." In Milton's poem, on the other hand, Satan is what he became for the Romantics, the vehicle for the imagination.

16. *Subversive Satan*

So important did such ideas become that the subsequent history of Satan among educated people became partly a matter of coping with Milton's impact. The Romantic poets were especially inclined to take Satan at more or less his own evaluation, as the poem's hero speaking and acting from (in that wonderfully ambivalent phrase) "sence of injur'd merit" (1.98). Blake and Shelley are the best examples of those who celebrated Satan. In a famous passage in his collection of aphorisms, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, written between 1790 and 1793 in the wake of the French Revolution, William Blake wrote, in those words that most intelligent (young) people have attended to ever since:

[92] The process is traced in D. P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964). To Dr. Faustus's claim that "hell's a fable," Mephistopheles replies: "Ay, think so still, till experience change thy mind" (A text, 2.1.130–1), a response that leaves the objective existence of Hell ambiguous. Cf. Sir John Harington on his 1604 translation of *The Sixth Book of Virgil's Aeneid*, ed. Simon Cauchi (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 74. "thear are growing up new teachers in this age that will overthrow all this learning of owrs . . . say that yt selfe ys but meer poetry . . . I, . . . to prove by skripture that hell ys a defynyt and locall place, beneath the earth, and that Christ Descended into yt, will add a few lynes to this purpose."

> Those who restrain desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained; and the restrainer or reason usurps its place & governs the unwilling.
> And being restrain'd, it by degrees becomes passive, till it is only the shadow of desire.
> The history of this is written in Paradise Lost, & the Governor or Reason is call'd Messiah.
> And the original Archangel, or possessor of the command of the heavenly host, is call'd the Devil or Satan, and his children are call'd Sin and Death. . . .
> Note: The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels and God, and at liberty when of Devils and Hell, is because he was a true poet and of the Devils party without knowing it.[93]

Blake thus read in Milton's poem the perennial conflict of reason and desire, and says that Milton himself experienced the conflict in the writing. Apart from the general encouragement it offers to desire, the most influential part of this statement has been the alignment of true poet with devils. In the Romantic aesthetic there was something daemonic about the poetic imagination,[94] and the idea is extended in the quotation from Wallace Stevens that serves as Epigraph to my Preface. But before we build too much on one aphorism, we might recall that the Satan of Blake's poem *Milton* is not very heroic (see Book the First, canto 4), and also that the aphorism itself is potentially ironic: it is spoken, after all, by someone called "the Devil"—Blake's local variant of the printer's imp.

Shelley's language is even more eloquent, brilliantly reversing the conventional roles of the two antagonists, God and Devil, and making the reader share the reversal.

> Implacable hate, patient cunning and a sleepless refinement of device to inflict the extremest anguish on an enemy, these things are evil; and although venial in a slave, are not to be forgiven in a tyrant; although redeemed by much that ennobles his defeat in one subdued, are marked by all that dishonours the conquest in the victor. Milton's Devil as a moral being is so far superior to his God, as One who perseveres in some purposes which he has conceived to be excellent in spite of adversity and torture, is to One who in the cold security of undoubted triumph inflicts

[93] *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, pl. 5, in David V. Erdman, ed., *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (New York: Doubleday, 2d ed. 1988), p. 35. See Calvin Huckabay, "The Satanist Controversy of the Nineteenth Century," *Studies in English Renaissance Literature*, ed. Waldo F. McNeil (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1962), pp. 197–210, and John M. Steadman, "Idea of Satan," 253–94.

[94] Lucy Newlyn, *Romantic Reader*, pp. 239–41, writes of Wordsworth's "Miltonic apprehension of the Fall as the birth of imagination."

> the most horrible revenge upon his enemy, not from any mistaken notion of inducing him to repent of a perseverance in enmity, but with the alleged design of exasperating him to deserve new torments. Milton has so far violated the popular creed (if this shall be judged to be a violation) as to have alleged no superiority of moral virtue to his God over his Devil. And this bold neglect of a direct moral purpose is the most decisive proof of the supremacy of Milton's genius. (*The Defence of Poetry*, 1821)[95]

In these eloquent lines, Shelley reproduces the conventional description of Satan, before springing the surprise that it is God he means by his talk of a tyrant and sadistic victor. Shelley's purpose is to insist that the great poets are subversive of the orthodoxies current in their time. Thus Dante and Milton both come to us in a disguise, such that we must discern their genuine and heretical feelings beneath the mask of orthodoxy. *Paradise Lost* "contains within itself a philosophical refutation of that system, of which, by a strange and natural antithesis, it has been a chief popular support." Shelley is here inclined to only one side of that double message.

In the preface to *Prometheus Unbound* (August 1820), however, Shelley gives a more balanced view of Milton's Satan. Comparing Satan to Prometheus, his own hero, he admits that Satan is not free from "the taints of ambition, envy, revenge, and a desire for personal aggrandisement. . . . The character of Satan engenders in the mind a pernicious casuistry which leads us to weigh his faults with his wrongs, and to excuse the former because the latter exceed all measure."[96] Thus even among these Romantic readers, revolutionary, imaginative, eloquent, eager as they were to oppose the enforced ennuis of Enlightenment orthodoxies that Samuel Johnson articulated, we find an awareness of the ambivalence of the Satan character and a willingness to explore its implications for poetry and politics. Keats scored in the margins of his copy of the poem especially those passages that suggest inner conflict, such as the moments when he responds with admiration to Adam and Eve and then forces himself back toward hatred (4.366–75; 9.154); one passage marked with triple strokes in the margin is Satan's reference to "the hateful siege / Of contraries" (9.121–22).[97] The orthodox critics of the twentieth century, who have expended so much energy trying to reverse the Romantic readings, might have worried less if

[95] Wittreich, *Romantics*, pp. 537–38.

[96] Ibid., p. 531. See also Lucy Newlyn, *Romantic Reader*, p. 145. She shows how the Romantic Milton became more complex and nuanced as the aftermath of the French Revolution became more unpleasant, e.g., p. 100. For Wordsworth and Coleridge, she writes, "Satanic allusion is not the register of ideological certitude, but of moral and political *angst*" (p. 7). This fine book also shows how well the Romantics understood Milton, and used him to think.

[97] Beth Lau, "Keats's Marginalia in Paradise Lost," in *Milton, the Metaphysicals, and Romanticism*, ed. Lisa Low and Anthony John Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 154. For the politics of Keats's reaction, see the Conclusion, "Disastrous twilight," below.

they had read the Romantic poet-critics more closely. They could have used them against themselves. Blake admirably pointed out that the history of *Paradise Lost* "has been adopted by both parties."[98]

17. *Critical Controversies*

In the view of their opponents, these Romantic readers "start with Satan" and never get beyond him.[99] American opponents have been especially severe. Marjorie Nicholson, for example, precisely historical in her reading, proposed not only, what is largely true, that the Romantics read Milton's troubled and radical personality into what he wrote, but more severely and unjustly, that they probably never read beyond the first two books of *Paradise Lost*.[100]

We all need to be careful here: those who sup with the Devil, as the saying goes, should use a long spoon. Satan-as-hero calls into doubt almost everything upon which Christian believers and even their nonbelieving heirs base their lives. If my nonbelieving reader would dispute this notion, then let him or her listen to one of the "Inklings," that group of Oxford Christians of the mid-twentieth century, who included Charles Williams, J.R.R. Tolkien, and C. S. Lewis. Lewis it is who responds most eloquently to the Romantics and explains what it means to him to admire Satan:

> [It is] to give one's vote not only for a world of misery, but also for a world of lies and propaganda, of wishful thinking, of incessant autobiography. Yet the choice is possible. Hardly a day passes without some slight movement towards it in each one of us. That is what makes *Paradise Lost* so serious a poem. The thing is possible, and the exposure of it is resented. . . . Satan *wants* to go on being Satan. This is the real meaning of his choice "Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n." Some, to the very end, will think this a fine thing to say; others will think that it fails to be roaring farce only because it spells agony.[101]

This is powerful stuff. Lewis was writing during the Second Great War against the Germans, what had already become "the Second World War" by that time, and it is not hard to recognize the urgency of wartime language in those splendidly turned phrases.

Yet the matter is not as rhetorically simple as Lewis's silken, subtly moralizing prose might lead us to believe. He has been answered. Above all William Empson was the great antagonist to what he called this "neo-Christian" read-

[98] *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, pl. 5, 1.41, in Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, p. 35.
[99] Douglas Bush, "Recent Criticism of *Paradise Lost*," *Philological Quarterly* 28 (1949): 39.
[100] Marjorie Nicholson, *John Milton: A Reader's Guide to His Poetry* (New York, 1963) p. 136.
[101] C. S. Lewis, *Preface*, p. 100.

ing.[102] He thought that Milton was almost as appalled as Empson himself by the Christian religion, especially by its God, and tried to indicate his specific reservations while nonetheless retelling the basic Christian narrative. Empson's Milton is an honest man, who acknowledges the often unpleasant implications of what he believes even while he tries to articulate the fundamental structure of his theological system. At the very least, one can say that Empson's approach gave him a way to explain the doubleness of vision, the conflicting discourses, that almost all intelligent readers notice in *Paradise Lost*.

Empson's view of Satan followed Shelley's in as much as both believed the Christian God to be wicked, and thus that his adversary was justified (of course, neither actually believed *in* him).[103] But Empson by 1961 had more to answer. He had to argue, for example, that Satan does not know God is omnipotent, and therefore is not foolish to oppose him (as Charles Williams and Lewis had said). Satan claims after the battle, Empson thought rightfully, that God "his strength conceal'd / Which tempted our attempt" (1.641–42). Satan fights with hope, even if the narrator, knowing what Satan does not know, lays on the irony. Empson's method is to imagine for us how things would have appeared to Satan, to recreate him as a character with an inside, indeed a Hellish depth: that after all is what Milton had done. He does not deny that Milton probably disliked Satan (44), but shows his cause to be just. Empson's Satan resists the arbitrary imposition of a new king, and then continues to fight by other means in the belief he can pull it off. He is the heroic Satan as long as he believes his power, but when, in Book 4 on Mount Niphates, he begins to doubt his own cause (70), his moral position begins to deteriorate, as C. S. Lewis had argued:

> From hero to general, from general to politician, from politician to secret service agent, and thence to a thing that peers in at bedroom or bathroom windows, and thence to a toad, and finally to a snake—such is the progress of Satan (97).

There is an unmistakable sneer in Lewis's description of Satan's degradation. Empson, though, holds to his admiration as long as he can. The bulk of Emp-

[102] Empson, *Milton's God*. Empson's challenge was later taken up by Dennis Danielson, *Milton's Good God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), a book that argues for an orthodox reading of the Fall. Both books have unfortunately been allowed to go out of print.

[103] Shelley's essay, "On the Devil, and Devils," makes clear that he is opposed to the Christian God in general, not just Milton's. The essay was probably written at the same time as the preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, which it often duplicates, but remained unpublished till late in the century, probably because Shelley knew it was unpublishable. See Marilyn Butler, "Romantic Manichaeism: Shelley's 'On the Devil, and Devils' and Byron's Mythological Dramas", in *The Sun is God*, ed. J. B. Bullen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). Byron's *Cain* (1821), though much less irreverent, was probably influenced by Shelley's essay, certainly by his views: the play a "mystery," was never intended for the stage, but received a gripping production by John Barton at the RSC in 1995.

son's defence of Satan concentrates on his early career, and he is especially eloquent in his description of Satan's intellectual arguments in Book 5. In this respect he agrees with those who find the originals of Satan's views in various heresies, especially Gnostic and Manichaean.[104] This God is no longer the Creator of Christian orthodoxy, and Satan is fully justified in suggesting that he and the other fallen angels are "self-begot, self-rais'd, / By our own quick'ning power" (5.860–61).

Since Lewis and Empson, there have been fresh moves in the debate, especially that influential American attempt, by Stanley Fish, to subsume this opposition between Christian and anti-Christian within a reader-response version of what Milton is up to.[105] Fish argued that the poems, and even the prose at times, invite both pro– and anti– readings because Milton wants his readers to experience for themselves as fully as possible the soul-rending dilemmas of the Christian religion. Indeed the reader, not Satan or Adam or Christ, becomes the true hero of the poem by experiencing in the act of reading the basic Christian pattern of Fall and Redemption. Fish's Milton designed his texts as a "good temptation"—or a testing experience—for all of us: the Satanic readers, the Shelleys, Blakes, and Empsons, were simply those who failed the test, or who proved themselves bad or partial readers. So also, from the opposite point of view, were the new breed of anti-Miltonists spawned by those anti-Romantics T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis—critics such as A.J.A. Waldock, John Peter, or Harold R. Swardson. We are all fallen, said Fish, and we all therefore reenact the Fall with every act of reading: Fish cleverly assembled lots of readers' "errors" from both camps to confirm his point. But Fishean reading was also an experience, if we were ready, of the possibility of redemption. As ordinary humans we resist the obvious meanings of the biblical texts, but as redeemed Christians we are then led to acknowledge their accuracy (and that of Fish). And thus we reject the appeal of Satan and all his works.

This approach quickly became orthodox in American universities. Most professional readers of Milton, especially in the United States, have refused to accept the full extent of the sympathy Satan exacts from us. Instead they insist on the Christian moral values supposedly conveyed, and right from the beginning of the poem. Thus Barbara Lewalski argued that Milton's intention in using an epic model is neither to debase the epic genre nor to exalt Satan as hero, but rather to show the human face of evil and its perversion of the good.

[104] Empson, *Milton's God*, pp. 84–90, is at his most charming here: he admits, for example, after telling us about the various critics who had previously explored the heresies, that the translator of Milton's Latin treatise *De doctrina Christiana* "remarks, in a footnote . . . : 'The opinion that the angels were not created, but self-existent, according to the Manichaean system, is with great propriety attributed to Satan in Paradise Lost.' I felt rather snubbed, after adventuring among such peaks of learning, to find that the point was obvious to a theologian in 1825, but perhaps it helps to show that the illiberal attitude to Satan is a recent one" (88).

[105] See Introduction, 3 above, and chap. 2.5, below, for further discussion of Fish.

Wherever the epic parallel threatens the moral scheme, the result is parody: Satan is ironically devalued through his pretensions to epic status.[106] Perpetual vigilance is necessary if we are not to be seduced by Satan. Richard DuRocher could insist that Satan is "the hero of an epic tradition that the poem ultimately disavows," and sees the poem as offering a kind of "heroic and at times perilous struggle between poetic fiction and Christian truth."[107] As with most such struggles in America these days, there is no doubt who will be the ultimate winner.

In Britain, however, the didactic Fish line has had less impact. For Lucy Newlyn, it merely gave too much weight to Locke's distinction between Judgment and Wit, and ignored the subsequent development by the Romantics of a very different poetics of reading: she could argue instead for a poet who, like his Romantic progeny, believed in "imaginative freedom." Various Satans are present, as the epic and dramatic allusions require, but "none of them is reduced by any final act of transvaluation, on Milton's part, in relation to the traditions from which they are drawn."[108] She can thus present a poem in which Eve's likeness to Satan is not grounds for a misogynist condemnation of both, but rather for a generous reevalution of "fall" itself as the occasion for imaginative gain. Other British Miltonists have been equally immune to Fish. John Carey showed us a Satan who requires our sympathy rather than our fear, while A. D. Nuttall, in a recent review, could demolish the whole Fishean edifice.[109]

Americans have also begun to dissent. John Rumrich, for example, has struck out in a different direction. He has challenged the Fish-informed consensus, on the grounds that its way of treating Milton's readers as victims of a text full of satanic pitfalls is pedagogically disastrous.[110] A poet who keeps luring his reader into mistakes and then saying "Gotcha!" is unlikely to appeal to any but masochistic students. What is more, the Fish reading, despite appearances, really endorses the "neo-Christians," Empson's targets. Rumrich wants to substitute for this Fishean Christianity a better awareness of the diversity of religious and political views in Milton's period, combined with a psychoanalytically informed feminism. Chaos, which he views as a kind of womb—ultimately, the womb of God—becomes more important for him than the

[106] Barbara Lewalski, Paradise Lost *and the Rhetoric of Literary Forms* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 17–28, 63–71.

[107] Richard J. DuRocher, *Milton and Ovid* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 119, 218.

[108] Newlyn, *Romantic Reader* pp. 74–75. Her critique of Fish is on pp. 10–11.

[109] John Carey, "Milton's Satan," in Dennis Danielson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) pp. 131–46. A. D.Nuttall, "Everything is over before it begins," review of Stanley Fish, *How Milton Works* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001) in *The London Review of Books*, 21 June 2001, pp. 19–21. Cf. Alastair Fowler's only slightly less hostile review in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 31 Aug. 2001, pp. 3–5.

[110] John Rumrich, *Milton Unbound* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

heavily masculinist tradition that elevates, or denigrates, Satan. He gives Chaos a privileged status because he thinks the indeterminacy it figures is exactly what Milton was brave enough to put at the center of his theodicy. The philosophy of matter it implies is directly linked to his politics and his poetics.

My own view is different in that it puts Satan, not Chaos, back at the center. I think Milton did indeed invite his readers to adopt a Satanic reading of Scripture and of human experience: he lived in an age of controversy almost as vital as that in which the New Testament itself was written, and obviously knew for himself most of what the various sects and schools understood by certain disputed biblical passages. Satan was the vehicle for the articulation of such controversies. Many of the poem's key-words belong to these controversies, words we shall explore as we go—"evil," "sin," "hate," "grace," "love." I like to think that Milton also hoped the main lines of the Satanic reading were wrong, but that he had no way to know for certain: some of the fascination of his poetry lies in this uncertainty, in how close he makes one side feel to the other. After years of murderous civil war over the politics and doctrine of Church and nation, this state of uncertainty was familiar to many of Milton's own seventeenth-century readers, and is what will have made the reading of Milton's great poem as powerful and persuasive, or scandalous, as we know it soon became. At the very least, the unpleasant God of the Old Testament in Milton's reconstruction, makes Satan's rebellion against him look thoroughly understandable. The result is that when Milton's Adam finally learns the true and secret meaning of the redemption of the world by Christ's sacrifice, and thus implicitly of the whole poem, he begins his response by saying "Full of doubt I stand" (12.473).

The doubt is not abolished by the end of Adam's speech, still less by that of the poem or by Christian doctrine. Nor are we much helped by the reflection that "doubt" comes from the Latin *dubitare*, meaning "to hesitate," and that the English word is also used in that Latin sense. What Adam hesitates about, after all, is a stark choice between two ways of reading the poem and man's fate, whether to repent of sin "By mee done and occasiond" (12.475) or to rejoice. At least that is where the line ends, and for the time being we shall leave the thought there.[111] The poem thus invites us, during its concluding dialogue with the angel, to take seriously the possibility that Adam might rejoice at his own sin. If that is the Satanic choice, so be it. The poem frequently invites similar choices from its readers, and makes the choices hard.

Satan then is the main challenge to Christian belief within the terms of the poem, and so the great doubter. That is one reason why I have called this book *The Satanic Epic*. He it is who questions and probes and wonders and

[111] The passage is discussed further in chap. 12, below. There is a puzzled account of it in Tilottama Rajan, "The Other Reading: Milton and Blake," in Low and Harding, *Milton, the Metaphysicals, and Romanticism*, pp. 35–38.

angrily denounces, and so gives voice to many of the inner and rhetorically moving arguments that Christianity has usually provoked. Fortunately this bizarre religion is a lot more interesting and diverse than it sounds in the honeyed words of a C. S. Lewis. The history of Christian polemic, as I have been trying to demonstrate, is full of strident voices raised against one or another of its doctrines. They arise in the New Testament itself with the Jewish Christians and the other opponents beyond the new Church whom Paul cites and argues with in his letters. And an apparently anti-Pauline point of view is present in, for example, the letter of James or the strange and controversial text, disliked by Luther, known as the Apocalypse, or The Revelation of Saint John the Divine. Such arguments continue in Justin Martyr's reply to Jewish and pagan critics, in Irenaeus's book *Against Heresies*, where several of his Gnostic opponents regard themselves as Christians, and especially in Celsus's intelligent pagan attack on Christianity, which Origen undertook to answer, and then in the struggle with the Manichaeans whom Augustine first joined for nine years and then attacked. Milton knew these formative texts, and refers to them explicitly in his prose writings. He knew above all that Christianity had formed itself as a religion of controversy, indeed that many of its fundamental doctrines arose from the quarrel with what came to be called heresy. That quarrel he dramatized in the figure of Satan and his wholly credible opposition to God.

The various quarrels of formative Christianity continue within Christian polemical literature, but they are especially interesting and revealing, because the range is wider and the intelligence usually more acute among professional readers of Milton. Many Milton critics read him with an informed sense of what Christians mean, even if their own positions are beyond the pale. One can relive, in the pages of Milton books and articles, some of the excitement that went with the establishing of a new religion, whether that of the first or the seventeenth century. I shall be making use of those commentaries as the argument of this book unfolds. Milton had lived through a period akin to that of the early Church: religion was always involved with politics, not only because of the question of church governance, about which Milton wrote at length (even likening the "lewd Hirelings" of the established priesthood to Satan, the "first grand Thief", [4.192–93]), but also because religion was a tool of state power, an instrument of oppression (as in Ireland), and, for many, the language of freedom and personal responsibility.

What, then, are Milton's readers really disagreeing about when they argue over Satan? I have just listed a few of the key issues, but probably the fundamental ground of debate is political. The Romantic poets were radicals, opposing what they regarded as the unholy alliance of Prussia, Austro-Hungary, Russia, and the British Empire against the French Revolution and its aftermath, and in the twentieth century Satan's defenders have, like Empson, tended to be left or liberal in their views. But these positions can be very

subtle. The shrewd American critic Robert M. Adams gently worried whether his own ideas could have any authority "against the Christian humanist morality that has held the strong right-center position in Miltonic criticism for so long."[112] He no doubt had in mind those for whom "mere Christianity," as Lewis put it, "commits every Christian to believing that 'the Devil is (in the long run) an ass.'" The Marxist historian Christopher Hill, however, though he thought Satan contained a good deal of Milton, nonetheless explained that the politics of Satan's position showed how the Good Old Cause of the revolution had gone wrong.[113] And Thomas Corns, like other recent critics, has eloquently distinguished Satan's contradictory radicalism from Milton's and aligned the poet more closely with the straightforward Abdiel.[114] But in all these debates, the terms of discourse are political, and the camps usually divide according to their political commitments.

William Hazlitt, contemporary of Keats and Shelley, with whom he discussed their views (and who preserved his own radicalism long after many older Romantics, like Wordsworth and especially Coleridge, had moved to the right), sums up the issue in a splendid passage, stressing both Satan's character and his politics (and thinking no doubt of both Byron and Napoleon); he shows that he has indeed read beyond the opening books of the poem:

> Satan is the most heroic subject that ever was chosen for a poem, and the execution is as perfect as the design is lofty. . . . The sense of his punishment seems lost in the magnitude of it; the fierceness of tormenting flames is qualified and made innoxious by the greater fierceness of his pride; the loss of infinite happiness to himself is compensated in thought, by the power of inflicting infinite misery on others. Yet Satan is not the principle of malignity, or of the abstract love of evil—but of the abstract love of power, of pride, of self-will personified, to which last principle all other good and evil, and even his own, are subordinate. From this principle he never flinches. . . . His thoughts burn like a hell within him; but the power of thought holds dominion in his mind over every other consideration.

[112] Robert M. Adams, "A Little Look Into Chaos," *Illustrious Evidence: Approaches to English Literature of the Early Seventeenth Century*, ed. Earl Miner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), p. 71, reprinted in Scott Elledge, ed., *Paradise Lost*, 2d ed., Norton Critical Editions (New York: Norton, 1993), pp. 617–32.

[113] Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution*, pp. 365–75.

[114] Thomas Corns, *Regaining*, pp. 48–53. Andrew Milner, *John Milton and the English Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 161, focuses on Abdiel in 6.174–81 on the topic, "When he who rules is worthiest," as distinguished from Satan's idea of servitude. Blair Worden argues that Milton was at pains to distinguish his own republicanism from Satan's false application of it. Milton, he thinks, was ironically quoting his own earlier politics, and regretting what happened to them under Cromwell: "Milton's Republicanism and the Tyranny of Heaven," in G. Bock, Q. Skinner, and M. Viroli, eds., *Macchiavelli and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 240–44.

Hazlitt has sensed both the grandeur and the tragic, inner ambivalence of the character. He continues (savor the rhetoric) by assessing Satan's literary progeny.

> The Achilles of Homer is not more distinct; the Titans were not more vast; Prometheus chained to his rock was not a more terrific example of suffering and of crime. Wherever the figure of Satan is introduced, whether he walks or flies, "rising aloft incumbent on the dusky air" [1.226], it is illustrated with the most striking and appropriate images: so that we see it always before us, gigantic irregular, portentous, uneasy, and disturbed—but dazzling in its faded splendour, the clouded ruins of a god. The deformity of Satan is only in the depravity of his will; he has no bodily deformity to excite our loathing or disgust. . . . [Milton] relied on the justice of his cause, and did not scruple to give the devil his due. Some persons may think that he has carried his liberality too far, and injured the cause he professed to espouse by making him the chief person in his poem. Considering the nature of his subject, he would be equally in danger of running into this fault, from his faith in religion, and his love of rebellion; and perhaps each of these motives had its full share in determining the choice of his subject.[115]

I quote at length because I consider this brilliant criticism, more subtle than that of Shelley. Hazlitt could see the problem of Satan from both sides: "faith in religion" balances "love of rebellion." I trust that anyone who reads those words now in the beginning of the twenty-first century will want to explore the subject further, to return to the question the Romantics posed and inquire whether or not this great poem is really "the Satanic epic."

[115] William Hazlitt, *Lectures on the English Poets*, III: "On Shakespeare and Milton," in Wittreich, *Romantics*, pp. 384–85.

TWO

THE EPIC VOICE

> The "demon" or devil, whom we meet on the first page and elsewhere in the novel, could he not be considered as a self-reflexive figure through whom the text presents itself? The "demon" is obviously the figure who gets the story going, but he is also the one who sets in motion the act of reading as a self-conscious activity.
>
> —ANNA SPLIVALLO, on *The Counterfeiters (Les Faux-Monnayeurs)*

In André Gide's *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* (*The Counterfeiters*) the "demon" who appears in the first paragraph may be read as a figure for the text itself in all its sinuous and self-reflexive turns. What is obvious in the case of a modernist and experimental novel, however, may take a little more demonstration if we are to make a similar case for Milton's epic. Clearly Satan is the figure who begins the story. But what of the narration itself?

1. *Seeing through Satan*

In the first books of the poem, Satan and narration are closely related. Almost as soon as the poem gets under way, the narrative describes Hell, and it does so almost entirely as Satan perceives it with "his baleful eyes" (1.56). We are told that for nine days Satan and his crew "lay vanquisht, rowling in the fiery gulfe" (1.52), and quickly we get to his thoughts, and then his perceptions. The narrator knows them all.

> for now the thought
> Both of lost happiness and lasting pain
> Torments him; round he throws his baleful eyes
> That witness'd huge affliction and dismay
> Mixt with obdurate pride and stedfast hate:
> At once as far as Angels kenn he views
> The dismal Situation waste and wilde.
>
> (PL 1.54–60)

The effect of the mingling of Satan's thought and perception here is to render the Hell he perceives, on one level, the product of that thought. Hell, as we soon become aware, is both a place and a state of mind.

Then something odd happens in the narration. What do Satan's baleful eyes first see? Well, they "witness'd huge affliction and dismay," mixed with pride and hate: apparently he perceives emotions similar to what he feels inwardly,

and thus does not really see anything at all but his own feelings. Quickly we have to correct this reading, however, and recognize, as Fowler and Flannagan both note, that the word "witness'd" must mean not "perceived" but "bore witness to." So we are *outside* Satan, looking at his eyes and what they show about his feelings. Satan has not yet been said to perceive anything, even though his eyes have been thrown round. Leonard, on the other hand, has the word pointing both ways: it means "bore witness to (his own affliction) and beheld (his followers')," which better catches the ambivalent effect. The narrative technique thus leaves in some doubt its relation to the perceiving Satan.[1] Only when Satan is said to "view" (1.59) do we definitely look outwards from his eyes.

What he sees, however, is notoriously uncertain. T. S. Eliot's tasteless comment about Milton's blindness having led him to write phrases like "darkness visible" because he cannot be said ever to have seen anything ignores centuries of interesting speculation about whether the flames of Hell give any light, and also, oddly for Eliot, the way the phrase adapts and concentrates Vergil.[2] But at least the comment points up the narrative issue: the problem is not Milton's blindness but visibility itself. And we may perhaps begin to question the reliability of the narrator's guidance, not because there is anything deliberately false about him, as there well may be about Satan, but because he is apparently bound by the limits of perception—at least in Hell.

The basic contrast is between what may be seen in Hell and, paradoxically, not seen in Heaven. There God speaks from "a flaming Mount, whose top / Brightness had made invisible" (5.598–99). Milton's text explores this contrast in narrative and in dialogue, first through what Satan sees around him, then through his first words to his chief companion, Beelzebub. His words, like the idea of "darkness visible," contain a double allusion, to the Bible and to Vergil.

> O how unlike the place from whence they fell!
> There the companions of his fall, o'erwhelm'd
> With Floods and Whirlwinds of tempestuous fire,
> He soon discerns, and weltring by his side

[1] David Lodge, "Mimesis and Diegesis in Modern Fiction," in *SPELL* 1 (Tubingen: Gunter Narr, 1984), pp. 96–97, reads a passage from *Middlemarch* to show how "the classic realist text" weaves itself into and out of Dorothea's consciousness. Milton's technique here is similar, moving from diegesis into mimesis and back to diegesis with the "hope never comes" allusion to Dante (66). In other terms, we are in the "oppositional mode" in which narrator and character have clearly separable identities, but we are also near the beginning of that "figural narrative situation," culminating in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, in which character and third-person narration are inextricably blended; see F. H. Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 79–91, 141–68, 186–94. Cf. Harry Berger, "*Paradise Lost* Evolving: Books I–IV. Toward a New View of the Poem as the Speaker's Experience," *Centennial Review* 11 (1967): 483–531.

[2] *Aeneid* 6.270–72, quoted in chap. 6, n. 32, below. Eliot's comment is in "Milton I" in *On Poetry and Poetics* (London: Faber, 1957), pp. 138–45.

> One next himself in power, and next in crime,
> Long after known in *Palestine*, and nam'd
> *Beelzebub*. To whom th' Arch-Enemy,
> And thence in Heav'n call'd Satan, with bold words
> Breaking the horrid silence thus began.
> If thou beest he; but O how fall'n! how chang'd
> From him, who in the happy Realms of Light
> Clothed with transcendent brightness didst out-shine
> Myriads though bright: . . .
>
> (PL 1.75–87)

Both the place and the person are immediately contrasted with Heaven: "O how unlike the place from whence they fell" is apparently the narrator's comment, though as often in these parts of the poem, it could also be beginning to register indirectly Satan's reaction to what he sees.[3] So his first words reiterate this reaction: ". . . O how fall'n! how chang'd."

How do the allusions work here? In some cases of allusion, major episodes and images of the Homeric epics, or Vergil's or Ovid's, are brought back to our consciousness.[4] This is not usually done just to establish the genre and lineage of *Paradise Lost*, though that is one important function of allusion, but rather with a specific and local purpose. Satan is here repeating some of the words of Aeneas to Hector from Vergil's *Aeneid*. Aeneas is recounting a dream in which the dead hero appears to him as he was when he had been dragged behind Achilles' chariot, covered in blood and dust:

> ei mihi, qualis erat, quantum mutatus ab illo
> Hectore qui redit exuvias indutus Achilli
> vel Danaum Phrygios iaculatus puppibus ignis!
>
> (*Aen.* 2.274–76)

> Ah me, what a sight he was, how different from that Hector who came back wearing the trophies of Achilles, or after hurling Phrygian [Trojan] firebrands onto the Greek ships!

[3] For the development of free indirect style in the seventeenth century, see Sylvia Adamson, "From empathetic deixis to empathetic narrative: stylisation and (de-) subjectivisation as processes of language change," in *Subjectivity and Subjectivisation*, ed. Dieter Stein and Susan Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) pp. 195–224.

[4] One example of each: Hector's soliloquy before he faces Achilles for the last time (*Iliad* 22.99–130) is recalled by that of Abdiel before he does combat with Satan at PL 6.114–26; the scales of Zeus (*Iliad* 8.68–77, 22.208–13) and Jupiter (*Aeneid* 12.725–27) recur at PL 4.997–1014, but merged with the famous writing on the wall of Daniel 5.27, in which Belshazar is weighed in the balance and found wanting (so the loser's scale flies up, not down as in Homer); the Tree of Life in Eden has "blooming Ambrosial Fruit / Of vegetable Gold" (4.219–20), recalling the golden apples of the Hesperides of Ovid, *Met.* 4.637f, referred to explicitly a few lines later (4.250).

The parallels are important. This is Aeneas's first appearance in his own story, and it occurs at a tragic moment: just as he thinks the danger to Troy is over and he can sleep soundly, Hector appears to tell him Troy will be utterly lost and he must prepare to escape to a new home across the sea. Satan speaks for the first time at a moment when he comes to the consciousness of his new state, now that Heaven is lost. But note the difference. Hector is changed but still Hector, and his deeds are still in Aeneas's memory. That indeed is one of the classic functions of epic, to preserve heroes in the memory of others. But who this devil is, Satan cannot quite say: he used to be . . . ? Who? We never learn the name he used to have in Heaven. And he is not yet Beelzebub, as the narrator tells us he is to be called later. Not only can Satan here not name his companion, he is not sure at first he even recognizes him. Thus the Vergilian allusion both establishes a parallel between the heroes of the two epics and invites us to consider the differences, which is what all thorough allusions do for the knowledgeable and sensitive reader.

What is more, the classical allusion overlaps with another, this time biblical: "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning" (Isaiah 14.12). That text is one of the most important for the identification of the Devil as the agent of evil in history, as the Christian Fathers constructed him, and especially for the story of his fall from heaven. Indeed these words have already been alluded to in the narrative before Satan first speaks (1.40–48). In Isaiah the words are spoken to the king of Babylon, whom they address metaphorically (and ironically) in language borrowed from an ancient myth about an ambitious god who had tried to enthrone himself among the stars, the divine assembly, but had been cast down to Sheol, to the pit, where he now finds himself, just as Satan does.

The Isaiah text, taken alone, might well appear to place the poem's language firmly in the tradition of Judeo-Christian reading of the Bible. But the simultaneous presence of Vergilian epic, and the language of the great and good hero, *pius* Aeneas, at that, loosens the relation between Milton's Satan and the firm place given the Devil by the Church Fathers. We may wonder at least just what story is being told or retold here, and feel uncertain how we are to evaluate it. And, given that the most immediate echo in Satan's opening exclamation is to the narrator's a few lines above ("O how unlike the place from whence they fell"), we may wonder about the narrative point of view.

And there are other problems, once we start to scratch the surface of the text in this way. For one thing, the narrator introduces these hesitant words of Satan as if they were quite different: he calls them "bold words" just two lines before we hear them, and the effect must be very disconcerting. Satan's words may become bold as the speech goes on, but that is not how they sound at the beginning. Indeed it is hard to exaggerate the importance of that first word of Satan's spoken in the poem: "If." He is awakening here, beginning to reconstitute himself. And that process is dramatized by the uncertainty of his speech,

its broken grammar. That first word also shows him as in a sense an embodied hypothesis, the eternal game-player who keeps trying out alternatives, other possibilities from those God has laid down. And some of that uncertainty and doubt may already transmit itself to the reader.

For another thing, is that biblical allusion really as safe as it sounds, even without the interference from the classical epic hero? The narrator is clear that Satan is speaking to Beelzebub, but Satan we have seen is uncertain just whom he is addressing. The words he quotes from Isaiah are addressed to Lucifer, at least in Jerome's Latin translation (*lucem ferre*, to bring light), though in the Hebrew, a language Milton could read,[5] this is *helel ben shahar*, "Shining One, Son of the Dawn." *Lucifer* seems to have been Satan's name before he became the adversary,[6] so the addressee of Satan's first words is at least in part himself (and he and his companion dear "were one," [678]). He it is who we soon learn has not yet lost all his original brightness (1.592), and who later tells the sun he hates him for reminding him of "what I was / In that bright eminence" (4.43–44).

2. *Hope and Despair*

This first grand speech of Satan's (1.84–124), in which he drags himself into consciousness, at first in a shambling uncertain syntax, and virtually reinvents himself after the disastrous fall from heaven, gradually shifts its tone and is latterly full of passion, defiance, and grandeur. It is a speech that is likely to raise the spirits of Beelzebub, his second-in-command, through its (oddly) passionate stoicism. The language is splendidly heroic—"bold words" at last, as the narrator had said they would be. But at the end of the speech the narrator again comments:

> So spake th' Apostate Angel, though in pain,
> Vaunting aloud, but rackt with deep despare.
>
> (PL 1.125–26)[7]

The comment is at odds with what our first reading of the speech will have told us, and invites us to go back and look again, to hear the inner despair within the outward pride that boasts of his "unconquerable Will, / And study of revenge, immortal hate, / And courage never to submit or yield" (1.106–8).

[5] W. B. Hunter, Jr., "Milton Translates the Psalms," *Philological Quarterly* 40 (1961): 485–94, and Golda Werman, *Milton and Midrash* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1995), p. 42, who writes that Milton "had sufficient knowledge of Hebrew to read the Bible and enough Aramaic to read the Targum—nothing more."

[6] John Leonard, *Naming*, pp. 90–145, explains the uncertainty: both 5.760, "The Palace of great *Lucifer*," and 10.425, "*Lucifer*, so by allusion calld / Of that bright Starr to *Satan* paragond," leave room for doubt.

[7] Leonard ad loc points out that the manuscript has "wracked," and suggests that "Satan is wrecked, ruined (*OED* 'wrack' 2, 3), but *In pain* gives priority to *racked*."

If we do so listen the second time, and hear the despair, we will also note odd contradictions. How, for example, we might ask Satan, can you expect a more successful outcome to the war this time when at the same time you admit (insist?) it will be eternal?

> We may with more successful hope resolve
> To wage by force or guile eternal Warr
> Irreconcileable, to our grand Foe.
>
> (PL 1.120–22)

At a first reading we also may not notice that Satan sees everything in physical terms: God's power is his Thunder. Satan is discovering himself in Hell, and Hell in himself.

John Steadman puts the problem well: on the surface,

> one sees only the "heroic" Satan, clothed in the full moral panoply of the conventional epic hero. But one does not need to look far beneath the surface to detect another pattern, and to the theologian this may seem remarkably close to despair. For what else are Satan's refusal to "repent" and his rejection of "Grace" than conventional signs of reprobation? The "fixt mind" that scorns "to repent or change" can be called heroic constancy; but it may also be diagnosed as "hardening of the heart"—the obduracy of conscience that is commonly symptomatic of a reprobate will.[8]

These are, one had better admit, key theological concerns, but they only become important once one has recognized the need to account for, perhaps even to exorcise, the power of the Satanic discourse. The speech itself is all about "hope" (88, 120), but the narrator has already told us, quoting Dante, that here in Hell "hope never comes / that comes to all" (66–67), and the concluding comment names the real emotion of the speech as "despare."

The contradiction between this speech and the narrator's subsequent comment has been a valuable site of critical discussion. G. Rostrevor Hamilton, responding in wartime (1944) to C. S. Lewis, pointed to the discrepancy between Milton's imagination and the comment, "vaunting aloud," of the "stern moralist, who could not fail to see with what glory the image of Satan was being clothed, [and] keeps a vigilant eye on the poet."[9] A.J.A. Waldock in 1947 complained that Milton's method is flawed since what is shown, the speech, and what is told, the comment, work against each other.[10] Many

[8] John M. Steadman, "Milton's Rhetoric: Satan and the 'Unjust Discourse'," *Milton Studies* 1 (1969): pp. 71–72.

[9] G. Rostrevor Hamilton, *Hero or Fool: a Study of Milton's Satan* (London: P.E.N. Books, Allen and Unwin, 1944), p. 10.

[10] A.J.A. Waldock, *Paradise Lost and Its Critics*, pp. 77–78. Robert McMahon, *The Two Poets of* Paradise Lost (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), pp. 70–71, argues for the

others have noticed the conflict, and commented. Richard Bradford, in an excellent brief student guide to the poem, writes that:

> The most striking and perplexing element of Book I is the fissure opened between Milton's presence as the guide and co-ordinator in the narrative and our perception of his characters as self-determined figures. This splitting of the reader's attention will become more complex and problematic as we proceed through the poem. . . . Would it be tenable to claim that Milton is engaged in a struggle with his own powers of rhetoric and creativity? Since the eighteenth century, critics have sensed a degree of unease between Milton's presentation of Satan as a tragically heroic figure and his duty to remain faithful to the orthodox Christian polarity of Satan (Evil) and God (Good).[11]

This is essentially a restatement in moderate, academic language of Blake's 1790 aphorism: "Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels and God, and at liberty when of Devils and Hell, . . . because he was a true poet and of the Devils party without knowing it." Blake, we have seen, located the conflict in the depths of Milton's personality, since he had already begun the Romantic process, extended by the Shelleys and Byron, of establishing the daemonic as the site of creativity—and reading Milton's Satan as its manifesto.

In 1977 Christopher Hill also wrote of Milton's "deeply divided personality," and extended this view to the political:

> Satan, the battleground for Milton's quarrel with himself, saw God as arbitrary power and nothing else. Against this he revolted: the Christian, Milton knew, must accept it. Yet how could a free and rational individual accept what God had done to his servants in England? On this reading, Milton expressed through Satan (of whom he disapproved) the dissatisfaction that he felt with the Father (whom intellectually he accepted).[12]

Stanley Fish defended Milton's technique by transferring the conflict between the two voices to the reader's conscience, arguing that the reader is intended to be persuaded by the speech, to discover the Satanic abyss in himself, but then to correct the fallen reaction by instruction from the narrator's authoritative perspective. We may be angry at the implied rebuke, but in the end we have to admit the epic voice is right.[13] Several critics have questioned this approach, both the idea that Milton might trick his supposedly naive reader,[14] and the

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inconsistencies or tension between Christianity and epic through his notion of a Bard who grows, and slowly detaches himself from Satan, but only after he has visited Heaven and met the Son, his true hero.

[11] Richard Bradford, *Paradise Lost* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992), p. 14.

[12] Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution*, pp. 366–67.

[13] Fish, *Surprised*, p. 289.

[14] RM, pp. 313–14; Corns, *Regaining* p. 121.

authority it invests in the narrator—and, indeed, in the critic who claims to read the narrator accurately. John Rumrich, with his own empirical version of reader response, claims never to have found a single student who "volunteered resentment at being corrected. . . . Confirmation of an already developing impression of Satan as a big talker has emerged as the most common response."[15]

Once we recognize that the narrator, as well as Milton, may be a complex or even inconsistent personality, we may ask ourselves whether he really means what he has usually been taken to say. Consider the constant and recurring question of allusion. In this case, for example, though the speech of Satan begins with an allusion to Aeneas's disconcerting dream, it is made by the concluding comment to correspond to the great speech of Aeneas near the opening of the *Aeneid*, in which he talks his tired and bedraggled men back towards courage.

> Talia voce refert, curisque ingentibus aeger
> spem vultu simulat, premit altum corde dolorem.
> (*Aen.* 1.208–9)

> Such things he says aloud, and while sick with great cares pretends hope in his face and suppresses his deep grief within his heart.

Oddly, Charles Martindale gives this as an example of an allusion that may be only probable rather than certain. The reason Martindale thinks one may doubt this allusion is apparently the discrepancy between the two heroes. He grants the structural parallel, but thinks

> Aeneas is a true leader who conceals his private emotions in the interest of his public duties; Satan by contrast speaks out of mere bravado, and his concealment serves his own evil desires, not the true interests of those he has misled. Alternatively the allusion may be less focused, simply giving a Vergilian or epic colour. Anyway a proper understanding of Milton's lines in no way depends on a recognition of its probable Vergilian basis; the allusion rather supports that understanding, or adds an enhancing resonance.[16]

It is curious that Martindale has no doubt about the "proper understanding" of Milton's lines, but doubts the allusion. Indeed the doubt seems to depend

[15] John Rumrich, *Milton Unbound*, pp. 21–22. He rather lets his sense of humor get away from him here: he compares Satan to "a loud, occasionally coherent man sprawled on the sidewalk outside some exclusive club, hurling imprecations at the (unseen) management within. At this point, at least, most would cut Satan a wide berth even if, for whatever reason, they felt sympathy for his plight". In the preface to the second edition of *Surprised By Sin*, Fish defends himself against his critics, including Rumrich.

[16] Charles Martindale, *John Milton and the Transformation of Ancient Epic* (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1986), p 4.

on that "proper" understanding, since the two heroes, on that understanding, are so different.

But what if the point of the allusion is to raise a doubt about that proper understanding? If we follow its implications thoroughly, it would indeed undercut Martindale's conviction that Satan speaks out of bravado only. Aeneas and Satan both make brave and persuasive speeches while hiding their true feelings. In both cases, then, we are invited to sympathize with this heroic and divided character. Granted the language is less positive for Satan: whereas Aeneas's tone is conveyed by the neutral *refert* (present, place before), Satan vaunts; whereas Aeneas feels "altum dolorem," Satan feels despair. And whereas Aeneas is said to merely "pretend" (*premit*) Satan is "rackt" by them (both "wrecked" and tortured). The theological implication that Steadman insists on might well be subversive of any imputed heroism in Satan, as long as the reader takes an orthodox view of theology, and is not swayed by sympathy for the character who is being constructed in this speech. If, however, we have any of the romantic in us—and the Romantics tended to take a heroic view of despair: Byron's Cain and Manfred, Shelley's Promethean variants of Satan, Mary Shelley's nameless monster—then we may feel sympathy for a being in such stifled pain more than we reprove the "fix'd mind" that scorns to repent. William Empson, though he clearly had some of that romantic in him, tried a different tack: he excused Satan's despair on the grounds that this is more the feeling of a defeated general than the unforgivable sin of certain medieval theologians.[17] Fowler ad loc briskly disposes of this position: "it is hard to imagine any sense in which fighting against God is not a religious experience." But Empson's larger point is that theology is less evident in these lines than the highly dramatic situation. He is also trying, he tells us, to unpick the argument of one S. Musgrove who, in an article of October 1945, "Is the Devil An Ass?", takes a firm line with Satan redolent of wartime propaganda against the enemy.

One might add that, wartime propaganda aside, the speech is powerful in eliciting sympathy for its heroic defiance, and that the narrator's comment *increases* the sympathy by revealing that internal discrepancy. In fact I do not know how any sensitive reader could not feel that extra sympathy: anyone who doesn't feel that sympathy (and I think most of those hard-nosed critics do, even when insisting in their angelic way on theology) is not equipped with the proper organs of sensitivity to read the poem. The heroic public persona becomes a troubled private self, the narrator's comment does not correct, it merely amplifies, and the sudden glimpse of that personal, intimate interior increases the closeness of the reader. Never mind the "vaunting," it's the despair that counts.

[17] Empson, *Milton's God*, p. 31.

3. *"Dark designs"*

Satan soon recovers himself. In his second speech ("Fall'n Cherube, to be weak is miserable"; 1.157–191 he already begins to develop a plan, and resolves to reverse God's plot for the world and the poem, "And out of good still to find means of evil" (1.165). The speech also seems to extend and answer the phrases of the narrator. The paradox of "darkness visible" is picked up in his more explicit

> Seest thou yon dreary Plain, forlorn and wilde,
> The seat of desolation, voyd of light,
> Save what the glimering of these livid flames
> Casts pale and dreadful?
>
> (PL 1.180–83)

And at the end of the speech he actively accepts the despair of which the narrator had covertly accused him. We should, he says, when we get over there, consult

> What reinforcement we may gain from Hope,
> If not what resolution from despare.
>
> (PL 1.190–91)

Satan thus accepts openly—and it was in this way that a Shelley read the lines—what had in the narrator's comment been a probing and apparently damning insight into what Satan really means. But as far as I can discover, none of the critics who insist on a major discrepancy between Satan and narrator then go on to analyze these lines, for they would destroy the point. They show a Satan accepting the narrator's position, as it were, and then turning it against him.

The narrator then cunningly reveals for the first time from what physical position the speech was delivered: "With head up-lift above the wave . . . his other parts besides / Prone on the Flood" (1.193–95). This new piece of information has been thought to diminish or undercut the power of the speech, retrospectively at least, just as the narrator had done in the case of the first speech. But most of the narrator's description is an extended epic simile for Satan's monstrous size, now for the first time mentioned. And at the conclusion of the simile, attention shifts not so much to anything embarrassing in Satan's position as to the immense plot of the whole poem, God's uncompromising purpose in allowing Satan this freedom, that he is to "heap on himself damnation" while showing God's goodness to mankind. Thus it is not so much Satan's discourse that is questioned by the narrator's comment: rather it serves, through the Leviathan simile, to introduce an image of the narrative itself, and of the reader who foolishly tries to drop anchor on its scaly rind.

In particular the process of undermining the surface narrative is carried out

'via the double meanings of some words, and a good example is the pun Milton exploits here on "at large." The pun occurs first at line 213, after the series of comparisons with the enormous size of Satan ("As whom the fables name of monstrous size"; line 197); it turns the narrative back from the physical dimension, what Satan himself is interested in, to the metaphysical situation:

> So strecht out huge in length the Arch-fiend lay
> Chain'd on the burning Lake, not ever thence
> Had ris'n or heav'd his head, but that the will
> And high permission of all-ruling Heaven
> Left him at large to his own dark designs,
> That with reiterated crimes he might
> Heap on himself damnation, while he sought
> Evil to others, and enrag'd might see
> How all his malice serv'd but to bring forth
> Infinite goodness, grace and mercy shewn
> On Man by him seduc't, but on himself
> Treble confusion, wrath and vengeance pour'd.
> Forthwith upright he rears from off the Pool
> His mighty Stature.
>
> (PL 1.209–222)

So the freedom Satan now experiences, the main meaning of "at large," is the basis of his future criminal activity, even though all of it will ultimately serve only further to damn him. One may well question, as Shelley and Empson (42f) did, the morality of a god who deludes his fallen enemy in this way. And the narrative now reminds us of Satan's size—but with a noble word, "mighty," after the cruelty, wrath, and vengeance of the comment on God's plot.

4. *Devils into Dwarfs*

But the immediate point to notice is how the narrator's discourse shifts among the words for size from "huge in length" to "at large" to "mighty stature." The same game with "large" recurs later in Book 1, and again as a comment on a sequence of similes about size. The devils enter the newly built structure of Pandaemonium, a "house of all the devils" unmistakably resembling St. Peter's in Rome, and suddenly

> Behold a wonder! they but now who seemed
> In bigness to surpass Earth's Giant Sons
> Now less than smallest dwarfs, in narrow room
> Throng numberless, like that Pigmean race
> . . . . . .

> Thus incorporeal spirits to smallest forms
> Reduc'd thir shapes immense, and were at large.
>
> (PL 1.777–90)

Paradise Lost is replete with words that shift their meanings in this way, or that retain another meaning under the surface, and this case is fairly typical: the idea of size is itself called into question simply by changing the perspective from which size is measured, as the similes overtly suggest, but the notion of "bigness" (an unusual form in an epic) or "large" is also questioned simply by allowing the word itself to cross meanings. The angels are free ("at large") to wander around the halls of Pandemonium, although "reduced."

Christopher Ricks, whose *Milton's Grand Style* did a great deal to redeem Milton from the charges of T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis, claims that "nothing could more effectively belittle the devils" than this "superbly contemptuous pun."[18] It seems to me, though, that this pun shows something very odd at work in the language, something that requires us to puzzle out our own perspective and not simply note the change within the poem: these swarming angels in a trice change not only from big to small, and from small to large, but from incorporeal spirits to forms and shapes, and the words themselves, like "large," will not stay still. Some upright commentators feel the need to ignore this manifest instability by insisting on their morals: "The angels are giants in their potentiality for destruction; they are equally pygmies in the presence of righteousness."[19] Does the text say that? Does it say anything like that? Surely what it does is move us all around so fast that we don't know exactly where we are anymore. It is as if, to use an analogy that the poem itself explores more than once, we keep flipping the ends of the telescope or "optic glass."

On this passage, as often, Voltaire is interesting. In the eighteenth century, no one could write epic any more, but mock-epics were common coin: Voltaire knew this from experience, having failed miserably with his own epic, *L'Henriade* (1723–28). In England, similarly, Pope had managed to translate Homer, to admire Milton, but himself to write only mock-epic, like the splendid *Rape of the Lock*. Voltaire, assuming Milton is here writing mock-heroic, not genuine epic, suggests that the metamorphosis

> heightens the ridicule of the whole Contrivance to an unexpressible Degree. Methinks the true Criterion for discerning what is really ridiculous in an Epick Poem, is to examine if the same Thing would not fit exactly the Mock Heroick. . . . no-thing is so adapted to that ludicrous way of writing, as the Metamorphosis of the Devils into Dwarfs.[20]

[18] Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style*, p. 15.

[19] Balachandra Rajan, cited by Fowler, ad loc.

[20] Voltaire, *Essay on Epic Poetry*, ed. Florence D. White (Albany, N.Y.: 1915), p. 137, cited in Broadbent and Fowler, ad loc.

Yes indeed, and if epic and mock-heroic seem the same thing, what does that do to the solemn authority most critics claim for the narrative voice? How far does the mockery extend, and how do you stop it? And since this pun actually begins its life as an attachment to the similes about Satan, then we may take it that he has something to do with the playfulness that doubles meanings and undermines certainties.

Not all modern readers have been convinced that ridicule is the way the text treats the devils. Satan's fourth and final speech (1.313–330) in this initiating sequence is addressed from the shore to the troops of devils who still lie sprawling on the burning lake. It is a powerful rallying cry, ending with the great (and deeply ironic) line, "Awake, arise, or be for ever fallen." The effect is immediate:

> They heard, and were abasht, and up they sprung
> Upon the wing, as when men wont to watch
> On duty, sleeping found by whom they dread,
> Rouse and bestir themselves ere well awake.
> Nor did they not perceave the evil plight
> In which they were, or the fierce pains not feel.
>
> (PL 1.331–36)

That lovely "ere well awake" catches something appealing, even humanly sympathetic, and indeed this whole sentence uses rather odd language: the double negatives, stretched by the double alliteration, make us momentarily pause and wonder what it would be like *not to not* feel something—the reverse of Keats's line from "A Drear-Nighted December," "the feel of not to feel it." As Fish puts it, "a defect in language is only the visible phase of a problem in perception";[21] that is, do they or don't they "perceave"? And that appealing side of the devils, suddenly awakened and scrambling to rise while still a bit sleepy, familiar to all children, and no doubt to the many readers who had fought through the recent civil wars, will be oddly complicated if we recall a famous biblical context in which other followers of another leader were found sleeping at the crucial time: Gethsemane. We need to spend a little more time thinking about these fallen angels before we rush to ridicule.

Soon the narrative seems to hesitate, conscious of a rather serious moral problem having to do with the devils' responsibility for their fate. As Satan looks at them, for example, he betrays

> Signs of remorse and passion to behold
> The fellows of his crime, the followers rather
> (Far other once beheld in bliss) condemn'd
> For ever now to have thir lot in pain,
> Millions of Spirits for his fault amerc't
> Of Heav'n, and from Eternal Splendors flung

[21] Fish, *Surprised*, p. 100.

> For his revolt, yet faithfull how they stood,
> Thir glory witherd.
>
> (PL 1.606–13)

The narration hesitates over the like-sounding "fellows" or "followers," and indeed it may be identifying here with Satan's uncertainty, and the powerful emotion he is experiencing, as he looks at the others. The narration seems further to wonder about "rather" or "Far other," as if it is getting entangled in the sounds of its own words. And most readers cannot withold the sympathy the narrator seems to feel here for those deluded followers, flung from "Eternal Splendors" for *his* revolt, "yet faithful how they stood." We may be worried, as I argued in the Introduction, that they should be condemned simply for following their leader's commands.

5. *The Critical Need for the "Narrator"*

This view of the poem's uncertain narration is not commonly accepted. Rather the argument that the poem is under the direction of an authoritative figure known as "the narrator" or "the epic voice" has a fine pedigree. Frank Kermode, for example, in his seminal essay "Adam Unparadised,"[22] writes of "the epic poet's privilege of intervening in his own voice . . . to regulate the reader's reaction." But Homer almost never does this, except very occasionally to address the Muse, or a character, like Menelaos, for whom he seems to have special sympathy. One hears Vergil's "own voice," perhaps, in a continuous but subdued dialogue with *pius* Aeneas, whose example he sets before us but whose values seem lost in the past. The explicit statements of that voice, however, are limited to the brief and conventional requests to the Muse, or in one dramatic case, that remarkable wish that he suddenly addresses to the underworld gods, just when Aeneas is about to go there: "sit mihi fas audita loqui, sit numine vestro / pandere res alta terra et caligine mersas" (may it be right for me to tell what I heard, to disclose by your power things buried in the dark and deep of earth) (*Aen.* 6.266–67). This is a question that Milton, by his odd logic, addresses not to darkness but to light, "May I express thee unblam'd?" (3.3). The narrator of the *Aeneid* never makes comments that subvert the speeches, except simply to tell us that Fate would not allow what the speech envisages, or that Jupiter thought otherwise.[23] So what then might the poet's "own voice" be?

[22] Frank Kermode, ed., *The Living Milton: Essays by Various Hands* (London: Routledge, 1960), p. 106.

[23] Fish, *Surprised*, p. 47, claims that the narrator's "At pius Aeneas" after Dido's appeal to Aeneas in Book 4.393 is a precedent for Milton, since T. E. Page, Vergil's late-nineteenth-century editor, was enraged: "How the man who wrote the lines placed in Dido's mouth could immediately afterwards speak of 'the good Aeneas, etc.' is one of the puzzles of literature." But the narrator's "placid" words are the standard formula for Aeneas, and they introduce a statement that explains how much he was moved, as the reader will have been, by what he has heard. There is no discrepancy at all between narrator and speech. On the rarity of Vergil's own voice in the poem,

Even if it is Dante who is the real precedent here, we need to remember that Dante as character and Dante as narrator are usually seen as distinct persons. And even Dante, who represents himself as present in the afterlife and is constantly drawn to sympathy or antipathy with the dead, needs a guide to correct him. Granted, Kermode goes on to find that "some of the effects he [Milton] gets from this device are far more complicated than is sometimes supposed," and he refuses any "crude didacticism" to the "corrective comments inserted after Satan has been making out a good case for himself." He continues that "the long-established custom of claiming that one understands Satan better than Milton did is strong testimony to the tact with which it is done. On this method the devil can have good tunes." Surprisingly Kermode concludes that "Milton even takes the risk of refraining from constant intervention and Satan-baiting in the first book, where the need for magnificence and energy is greatest."

Anne Ferry wrote an influential book all about Milton's narrator figure, and argues that when we find a discrepancy between our response to a character and "to the statement of the narrator which interprets it, we must judge the character by the interpretation, not the interpretation by the character's words or acts." For her generation of critics, there had been a strong tendency to read *Paradise Lost* as if it were a drama, ignoring the omnipresence of the narrator, and thus to find his interpretive comments to be "superfluities, irrelevancies, or just clumsy mistakes."[24] She argues, on the contrary, for a Milton who continually calls attention to the epic voice and "the role of the narrator as interpreter of the poem's meaning." She finds the narrator to have "an identity and characteristic tone [which are] sustained throughout the epic and [which] control our interpretation of its meaning." This view probably still holds for most Miltonists.[25]

The term "narrator" is derived from the theory of prose fiction, especially

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see Gordon Williams, *Technique and Ideas in the* Aeneid (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 215.

[24] Anne Ferry, *Milton's Epic Voice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. 16–22. Waldock's *Paradise Lost and Its Critics* is one of her particular targets, since he it was who called attention to the discrepancy betwen dramatic showing and narrative telling.

[25] McMahon's recent book, *Two Poets*, however, is all about the difference between Bard and "Milton": the Bard is singing in the present tense, emotionally involved, while the author "Milton" is distant from that act of composition and able to treat it with some composure. He reactivates Allan H. Gilbert's speculations in *On The Composition of "Paradise Lost"* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1947) as one way to show the difference between poet and Bard. This Bard is one of Milton's characters, and he changes throughout the poem, as Louis Martz had argued in *The Paradise Within* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), pp. 109–10. We must therefore treat this Bard's later pronouncements and views as more soundly based than his earlier. McMahon's view thus substitutes for the reader's learning the Bard's, and it means we must take his later view of Satan more seriously than his earlier. The book makes an important case for trying to distinguish narrator and poet, even if, as in their joint attraction to the naked Eve (p. 15), they are, I think, inseparable.

central in the critical writings of Henry James, further developed in the influential work of Wayne Booth, and then projected back onto the older and originating form of fiction, the epic, by Scholes and Kellogg. In particular the concept proposes something like a fully developed or rounded character as the teller of the tale, obvious enough in first-person narrative, but discernible also in the analysis of third-person or supposedly objective narratives. Problems with this concept have been articulated by French critics such as Roland Barthes and Gerard Genette, by Käte Hamburger, and especially in the analysis of consciousness in the novel developed by Dorrit Cohn. Ann Banfield has even attempted to abolish the shadowy narrator-character from fiction and to substitute simply the analysis of "narration." In this respect these critics bring into criticism, somewhat belatedly, the suspicions and practice of Joyce and Woolf and other writers of modernist fiction, who had tried to close or erase the gap between their characters and their narrative voices.[26]

These modernist suspicions are, on the face of it, irrelevant to the practice of epic. Even Mikhail Bakhtin, who established the polyphonic novel as the critical norm in his contrast of Dostoevsky with Tolstoy, insisted on the radical distinction in this respect between monologic epic and the dialogic novel.[27]

[26] Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1961] 1983), wrote a long afterword to the second edition, taking account of his critics, especially the French. For a technical linguistic critique of the narrator concept, see especially Anne Banfield, *Unspeakable Sentences* (Boston and London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), pp. 65–68 (on Flaubert and Woolf), and pp. 183–254, especially the section on "The historical development of narrative style," where it is shown that the stylistic features we associate with the novel, especially indirectly represented speech and thought, are absent from oral forms of literature but develop throughout Europe between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. The example of seventeenth-century literature is French, the *Fables* of La Fontaine (230). For seventeenth-century English prose, see Sylvia Adamson, "The rise and fall of empathetic narrative: a historical perspective on perspective," in *New Perspectives on Narrative Perspective*, ed. Willie van Peer and Seymour Chatman (Binghamton: State University of New York Press, 2001), pp. 83–99.

[27] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 3–40, argues that what he calls "the epic past" is the absolute past: "it is walled off absolutely from all subsequent times, and above all from those times in which the singer and his listeners are located" (15–16). That may be true of Paradise itself, creating a powerful feeling of nostalgia, but for Milton it is clearly untrue that the world described is walled off from the listeners/readers. The world includes both present and past, as well as the future to which Bakhtin devotes the novel. It is surprising, perhaps, but there are several passages in which the past of the narration becomes present. Actually Bakhtin's notion of epic is derived chiefly from German Romantic theory of Goethe and Schiller collaborating in 1797, where the epic is a heroic and nationalist song. It is they who argue for the distance, "the absolute past," of epic (13). Obviously Milton's narrator occupies the same present as his readers ("O when meet now / Such pairs, in Love and mutual Honour joyn'd?"; 8.58–59), in spite of his efforts to invoke the Heav'nly Muse to help him fly. For the crucial relationship with the reader, signalled by the epic narrator's famous desire to "fit audience find, though few," see the Jaussian analysis by Vera Nünning of the "Rezeptionsgeschichte" of *The Vicar of Wakefield* in *Unreliable Narration: Studien zur Theorie und Praxis unglaubwürdigen Erzählens in der englischsprachigen Erzählliteratur*, ed. Ansgar Nünning (Trier: Wissen-

And in the widely accepted argument of Stanley Fish, the voice that tells (or sings) the tale in epic has a peculiar authority. Where there is an apparent conflict between the voice and the dramatic scene, it should be resolved in favor of "an authority who is a natural ally against the difficulties of the poem."[28] Now this strikes me as a very odd view, though understandable: after all it gives readers what we (or many of us) feel we need, an instant and infallible source of evaluation. How am I to read this strange and bizarre text? Turn to the narrator and he will explain and show me how to judge. Narrators both tell and evaluate, and all one need do is follow their lead.

An objection immediately suggests itself, as Fish acknowledges: usually in epic narratives there is no discrepancy of this kind between dramatic or scenic representation and narratorial judgement: the comments of other epic voices "either confirm or anticipate the reading experience." Neither Homer nor Vergil, we just saw, contradicts his characters: even for the evil Allecto, as we shall see in chapter 6, Vergil offers no major interpretive dilemmas for the reader to puzzle out. Yet in *Paradise Lost* we cannot help but notice, as Fish puts it, the clash of authorities. Since the "difficulties of the poem" are largely Satanic, at least to begin with, it is Satan who seems to require this different mode of narration, and indeed it is clearly Satan (and soon the other devils) who inspires the narrator's interventions.

Yet even in his own terms, Homer's narrator may not represent the kind of authority that Milton's seems to need. In their excellent survey of ancient narrative techniques, Scholes and Kellogg assess the issue of the authority of the narrator:

> In mythic or traditional narrative the events being narrated are always well back in the past and the tradition itself carries its own authority. . . . The tradition . . . also limits his flexibility. The familiar invocation to the muse of Homeric epic may well represent an attempt on the part of the Greek epic poet to shift the authority from constricting tradition to inspiration, which is freer because personal and creative. The inspired bard must answer to his muse alone, and his muse can speak only through him. . . . It seems highly likely that the invocation is a sophisticated feature which developed late in Greek oral epic as a manifestation of the creative impulse toward a more fictional kind of narrative. Homeric epic, though it preserves many of the features of primitive epic, is a more sophisticated form than either the earlier *Gilgamesh* or the later *Beowulf*, and has actually started to move toward romance.[29]

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schaftlicher Verlag Trier, 1998), pp. 264–93. Among many others, Thomas Corns, in *Regaining*, perhaps the best student guide, proposes that "Milton's poem is at most only transitorily dialogic" (122), and insists on the awesome power of the godhead.

[28] Stanley Fish, *Surprised*, p. 46. Fish enlists Kermode as an important precursor, p. 11.

[29] Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University

We might add that the Serbo-Croatian singers studied by Milman Parry and Albert Lord knew no muses, nor did the singer of the *Chanson de Roland*.

Of course, we may allow this historical insight, and still insist that the Homeric narrator has, through this device, precisely the authority he needs for the credibility of the tales. Thus the traditional epic Milton was imitating may, indeed, work in the way that Fish claims: he quotes Wayne Booth in support of what he takes to be "the historical reality of the genre" (i.e., simplifying all the interpretive issues by denying any discrepancy between tale and teller, so that "the gods themselves are often unreliable, [but] Homer—the Homer we know—is not"):[30] but modern fiction obviously doesn't work that way, and arguably Milton's poems stand poised or suspended between epic and novel. Several critics have argued that *Paradise Lost* is in some ways like a novel,[31] given its primary focus on love between man and woman, the great bourgeois issue, and on the interiority of its characters, especially Satan.

And what is more, Milton invented a very peculiar voice if he wanted it to be the standard voice of epic authority, since he drenches it with feeling, personal feeling, explicit and not hidden, and from the very first. His blindness, for example, something blind Homer never mentions, is already implied in the first invocation by the allusion to "*Siloa*'s brook" (1.11) where Jesus healed the blind man (John 9.1–11, 30–39), and in the third book he publicly discusses his blindness in connection with Holy Light. Political reason for this there may well have been, in that it allowed Milton to controvert those Royalists who claimed his blindness was a divine punishment (as he does explicitly in the *Second Defence*),[32] but the inescapable effect is to give the supposed narrator a personal character and a peculiar pain. He is no longer the godlike voice

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Press, 1966), p. 242. They go on to argue that the Greek historians substitute for the epic narrator a new kind of authority. "The *histor* as narrator is not a recorder or recounter but an investigator." They comment on the paucity of eyewitness accounts in ancient history and narrative, as if the model of the historians was regarded as more trustworthy. Nonetheless, Milton's narrator clearly takes seriously the authenticity of the eyewitness, but transfers it to his Muse: "Thou from the first / wast present." That is not something that Homer can say of his, or needs to say. See also Scholes, "Afterthoughts on Narrative: Language, Narrative and Anti-Narrative", in W.J.T. Mitchell, ed., *On Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicaco Press, 1981), pp. 200–8.

[30] Fish, *Surprised*, p. 46; Wayne Booth, *Rhetoric*, p. 4.

[31] Leo Damrosch, *God's Plot and Man's Stories* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 120, Joseph Wittreich, *Feminist Milton* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), and Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1988) all develop aspects of the relation of Milton's bourgeois epic to the new bourgeois genre of the novel. Cf. Kermode, *Living Milton*, p. 106, on the "very sophisticated, perhaps a 'novelistic'" device of presenting the world through the eyes of a character. Catherine Belsey, *John Milton: Language, Gender, Power* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), pp. 95–99, suggests that several features of *Paradise Regain'd* (interiority as in Christ's opening soliloquy, the story of a special marginal individual, a narrative voice that proclaims the truth of the fiction) also "point in the direction of the novel."

[32] YP 4.1.583–90; cf. PM, pp. 410–15.

of traditional epic, but the teller who intrudes himself (what Henry James disapproved of in Trollope) into the new genre now being born, the novel.

The problem with the traditional view of an authoritative narration, then, is that it may recognize a distinct "voice," but does not really distinguish poet and narrator: for Fish it is usually Milton (and not "Milton" either; that is, not unpleasantly or apologetically set off between quotation marks to suggest he is a constructed, and thus an inauthentic figure) who keeps setting us right, "since his concern with the reader is necessarily more direct than in any other poem." This follows from the logic of what Fish calls Milton's monism, referring everything back to God, such that any alternative voice must necessarily be opposed to God and no mere difference is to be tolerated.[33] If, however, we allow for a narrator who may not be simply some mythically unified "Milton," that the epic voice may well have a peculiar authority, but that it is also given a personal character and stance precisely because it thereby dramatizes the difficulty of establishing in any given difference what the right judgment or course of conduct may be, then we have a way to account for the wavering and shifts of tone and point of view that characterize that voice.

We shall also recognize the importance of Satan in constituting that voice as opposition ("the difficulties of the poem"), and in the risk of noisy intolerance that it runs. Indeed if it claims authority, it is much closer to what William Kerrigan claimed for the poet-prophet, anarchic, argumentative, arrogant, cantankerous, controversial: the authority is that of the Old Testament God of renunciation, war and vengeance for whom his prophets spoke (Kerrigan is here discussing the Calvinist John Knox), and the voice is similar to that which gloated over the defeat and death of Milton's opponent Salmasius: "I am he, who . . . with this stylus, the weapon of his choice, stabbed the reviler to the heart."[34] The authority is that of the victor, and the defeated enemy in the poem is Satan. But the voice is also one that exploits its own similarity with Satan and deliberately adopts his point of view.[35] Whether in opposition or collusion, the narrator is not so independent of the contaminating Satan and his seductive discourse.

Even without that contaminating presence there are several oddities or inconsistencies in the epic voice. First there is the convention or the epic fiction of a privileged oral-aural experience, not the written-reading one we are actu-

[33] Fish, *Surprised*, p. 12. He makes it sound like the "relentless theology" Mary Baker Eddy recalled as her father's New England style (*New York Review of Books*, 27 Apr. 2000, p. 49).

[34] William Kerrigan, *Prophetic Milton* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1974), pp. 101, 125, quoting from Milton's *Second Defence*, CM 8.15.

[35] Parallels between poet and Satan are explored by William Riggs, *The Christian Poet in Paradise Lost* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 15–45, Kerrigan, *Prophetic*, pp. 142–59, and Janet Adelman, "Creation and the Place of the Poet in *Paradise Lost*," in *The Author in His Work*, ed. Louis Martz and Aubrey Williams (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), pp. 51–69; see chap. 9, below.

ally having. The Muse is invited to sing, to aid the "adventurous Song" that intends to pursue "Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime" (1.16)—an odd phrase, parodying Ariosto, as commentators note, but only indirectly self-referential, since *Paradise Lost* is written neither in prose nor rhyme. Nor, clearly, is it sung.

Second, in these initial lines, the first invocation, the convention of the opening appeal to the Muse is far more personal and intense than in any precedent epic, exploiting the Protestant prayer ("But chiefly thou, O Spirit . . .") as much as the classical invocation, and we even hear later how the poet's personal Muse ("my Celestial Patroness" 9.21) visits him nightly and dictates to him slumbering; that is, in the most private and unguarded of times.[36] Milton is perhaps constructing a special relationship in reaction against the rationalist view that the Muse convention was decidedly problematic. Davenant's preface to *Gondibert* (1650) calls it "saucy familiarity with a true God" and Hobbes endorses this view, adding that he can not understand why it was necessary to be thought to speake by inspiration, like a bagpipe."[37] But the result is that the conventional relationship with the classical Muse has become intimate, and, with its unspoken eroticism, potentially disruptive. Satan, after all, can also whisper his poison in sleeping ears.

Third, and most obvious, the "voice" is not single, even when we first meet it, but double, since it is represented as the voice of both the poet and his Muse: the Muse may sing, but it is "my adventurous Song"—and both within seven lines. Anne Ferry herself argued that the narrator has both fallen knowledge and inspired vision, is both a blind bard and a bird in flight:

> In the epic both images express the complex nature of the narrative voice—the speaker as limited human creature whose vision was dimmed by the Fall (just as Satan's brightness was eclipsed by his sin and Adam's eyes were darkened by disobedience); and the speaker is inspired seer whose divine illumination transcends the limits of mortal vision.

[36] A fine analysis of the psychoanalytic implications of Milton's Muse, including its castration anxiety, is Stanley Fish, "With Mortal Voice: Milton Defends Against the Muse," *ELH 62* (1995): 509–27. In spite of his insistence that "in a celestial song no one can be said to be doing the singing; rather, everyone is sung by an informing presence whose precedence is endlessly and involuntarily declared," the gender conflict between Milton and his Muse is a curious topic for a critic who would insist on Milton's monism. Fish (pp. 515–16) discusses the story of Bellerophon and Antaea in a way that makes *Paradise Lost*, at least in its invocations, sound like *Venus and Adonis*. That is fascinating, but it hardly adds authority to the epic voice, now mortal, even if he were able, as he prays, and unlike Bellerophon, to cope with his amorous muse and the outraged Jupiter. Understandably, as he begins the second half of the poem, he prefers "Standing on Earth" to being "rapt above the Pole" (7.23). And he may well now sing safer, "with mortal voice," but not necessarily, as he claims, "unchang'd" (7.24).

[37] *Sir William Davenant's "Gondibert,"* ed. David F. Gladish (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 22, 49.

For Ferry, though, these two dimensions were not especially troubling: indeed together they lend the voice authority. But for Milton, as she acknowledged, there *was* a problem, since he felt that in his bird role, soaring "Above the flight of *Pegasean* wing" (7.4), he risked the fate of Bellerophon, falling to earth "Erroneous there to wander and forlorne" (7.20). What this risk actually embodies, though, is merely a "complex tone that characterizes his voice throughout the epic." There is no risk of inaccuracy or favoritism, for example, and no suggestion, despite the fervent prayer of Book 7, that Muse and fallen poet, bird and bard, might pull in different directions, against each other. Ferry insisted that one cannot separate, as do some critics, the poet from the moral commentator who "lectures us like a prig just when we are most involved in the story."[38]

Fourth, even on Ferry's own evidence, the narrator turns out to be rather a complex, even unstable personality, if indeed "he" may be regarded as a single personality at all: he is drawn towards the poem's characters even as he describes or evokes them. This magnetic relationship to the characters, something Bakhtin noted in discussing the polyphonic aspects of novels such as Dostoevsky's,[39] is especially disturbing when Satan or Eve, or both, are present. Sensing this problem, I think, Anne Ferry insisted on the unified personality of the narrator, although she chose a particularly unfortunate passage on which to hang her point:

[38] Anne Ferry, *Epic Voice*, pp. 28, 35, 56. G. K. Hunter, *Paradise Lost* has several intelligent pages (8–12) on this question, admitting the oscillation between pride and humility of the prayerful narrator, but claiming that here, "as always in Milton, the classics are invoked only as a procession of splendid captives, dragged in to grace the Christian triumph (and then be put to death)." The phrase is brilliant, but the judgment wrong. The classical references are constantly menacing the narrator's theology.

[39] See especially the second chapter of *Problems in Dostoevsky's Poetics*, and chap. 3, below. Rachel Falconer, *Orpheus Dis(re)membered*, and John Mulryan, "*Paradise Regained*: A Bakhtinian Analysis," *Milton Studies* 37, ed. Albert C. Labriola (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999), pp. 198–216, also make some attempt to apply Bakhtin to Milton, the one to *Paradise Lost*, the other to *Paradise Regain'd*. But neither makes very much of the "double-voiced discourse" so vital in modern responses to Bakhtin. Mulryan assumes it applies to Raskolnikov, and cites the Satan of *Paradise Regain'd* as a parallel, who indeed "inundates his own inner speech with the words of others, complicating them with his own accents or directly reaccenting them, entering into a passionate polemic with them . . . and to almost all of them he returns their own words, with altered tone and accent." Arguably this is even more true of the Satan of *Paradise Lost*, especially Book 9 (see chap. 9, below), but for Bakhtin what really matters is the attraction of the narrator towards his hero, so that the discourse of the narration itself becomes double-voiced, and leads towards the subsequent analyses of free indirect style that have occupied so much of novel criticism; see especially Anne Banfield, *Unspeakable Sentences*, and, for a practical illustration, Louise Flavin, "Free Indirect Discourse and the Clever Heroine of *Emma*," *Persuasions* 13 (1991): pp. 50–57, as well as Robert Clark, "Introduction" to Jane Austen's *Emma* (London: Dent, 1995), pp. xvii–xxii.

> So little knows
> Any, but God alone, to value right
> The good before him, but perverts best things
> To worst abuse, or to thir meanest use.
>
> (PL 4.201–4)

Ferry stipulated that

> This is not "Milton" suddenly intervening between Satan's point of view and the reader in order to speak out on his favorite theme, misused freedom. This is the same narrator who has described the hill, the undergrowth, and Satan's actions, who has uncovered his dissembling and told us his hidden schemes. It is the same narrator who will describe to us what "To all delight of human sense" (IV 206)—his, our own, and Adam's—is exposed but not to Satan's, who "Saw undelighted all delight" (IV 286). It is the same voice who will predict "Our Death" (IV 221) in which, with that phrase, he acknowledges and laments his share.[40]

An eloquent argument, exploiting anaphoric repetition to good effect ("This is the same narrator who . . ."). And I would agree that the difference between Satan and "human sense" with regard to "delight" is a part of the meaning of the passage, as we shall see in the next chapter. But it is curious to see how much Ferry's argument needs that narrator to be the same at all times, single, unified, authoritative. The poem itself, however, and Milton's own sense of how to tell the story, what dangers lie in it, are more complex—and not only, what Ferry allowed, in tone.

A final source of authority, we might suppose, is the alignment Milton makes for his epic voice, in these opening lines, with Moses. It would be hard, on the face of it, for a Protestant Christian steeped in the authority of the Bible, to find a better analogy for his own inspiration, although it may well be somewhat presumptuous of him. But if we compare what Milton writes about Moses and the Sabbath in his treatise, a very different notion of authority emerges.

> Probably Moses, who seems to have written the book of Genesis long after the giving of the law, inserted this sentence from the fourth commandment in what was, as it were, an opportune place. Thus he seized an opportunity of reminding the people about the reason, which was, so to speak, topical at this point in his narrative, but which God had really given many years later.[41]

[40] Ferry, *Epic Voice*, p. 55.

[41] *De doctrina Christiana*, (YP 6.353–54); cf. Kelley in "Introduction," p. 44.

We may be grateful that Milton himself did not have such a casual sense of narrative structure or chronology as he imputes to Moses here.[42] Certainly Milton follows epic convention and breaks the strict chronology of events, beginning in medias res. But he is careful not to muddle things,[43] which is what he implies about his great model Moses in this argument about the construction of the Bible. Moses as model turns out not to be so authoritative after all.

The further experience of the narrator within the language of the poem increases the uncertainty as he himself begins to express doubt. In the prayer to Holy Light that functions as the invocation to Book 3, he asks "May I express thee unblam'd?" The anxiety stems both from the ancient Judeo-Christian fear that representation of divinity is blasphemy, and also from the sense that in the recent journey through Hell and Chaos he may have been contaminated. Indeed the reader not attuned may assume that this is Satan, newly arrived from Chaos, still speaking.[44] In the central invocation, to Book 7 and the second half of the poem, he also speaks of the dangers that compass him round, and begs the Muse to drive far off the barbarous dissonance and bring no empty dreams: "So fail not thou, who thee implores" (7.38), a phrase in which it takes a second or two to get the pronoun reference sorted out (and which, incidentally, contradicts the "unimplor'd" of 9.22). In the last appearance of the voice in the poem, the meditation that substitutes for an invocation to Book 9, he betrays an even more serious anxiety, given his task, which is that the poem may not be inspired at all. At first, with the little word "If" that introduces the meditation on creativity, we sense no more than a politic modesty:

> If answerable style I can obtaine
> Of my Celestial Patroness, who deignes
> Her nightly visitation unimplor'd,
> And dictates to me slumbring, or inspires
> Easie my unpremeditated Verse.
>
> (PL 9.20–24)

But by the end, once he has reviewed his reluctance to write heroic verse at all, he returns to the theme with more anxiety.

[42] Thomas Corns, however, in common with almost all other critics, argues that the equation of the epic "with the Pentateuchal narration of Moses" (*Regaining*, p. 123) is a way to define the narrator's voice as authoritative, and assert a "complete control over the narrative line, despite the fact that it relates in part to prophetic events, and despite the fact that it covers at least six millenia."

[43] Critics sometimes do. See chap. 5, below, on the typology implied by the three-day War in Heaven.

[44] G. K. Hunter, *Paradise Lost*, p. 43, offers this welcome suggestion. See also McMahon, *Two Poets*, p. 39.

> Mee of these
> Nor skilld nor studious, higher Argument
> Remaines, sufficient of itself to raise
> That name, unless an age too late, or cold
> Climat, or Years damp my intended wing
> Deprest, and much they may, if all be mine,
> Not Hers who brings it nightly to my Ear.
>
> (PL 9.41–47)

On these breathtakingly honest lines, William Kerrigan commented that the narrator is reproducing Calvin's version of prophetic inspiration, in which the writer must add nothing of his own to what he speaks. All must be "Hers."

> But as he claims this authority, he expresses the fullest doubt. The ambitious suggestions of Book I account for the tremendous power of these lines, the final words of the final invocation. In a single conditional clause, the poet experiences a moment of absolute mistrust, beautifully controlled with the grim understatement of 'and much they may'. If Milton is the author of this poem, if he is the artist instead of the instrument, then he fails as poet and prophet. Since God particularly despises false prophets, failure in this context ranges from humiliation to something like damnation. The poet departs from his poem, leaving the conditional clause unanswered, uncompromised.[45]

Modesty has overstepped itself, and allowed entrance to these depressed thoughts of old age and an unfinished task. The first "if"-clause adopts a positive attitude, "if I can," but the second suggests the negative possibility, "if all be mine, not hers." It is hard, surely, if we return to the earlier expressions of this voice, not to hear there too something of the same doubts—to hear, in fact, the parallel with Satan's tentative first word, "If."

6. *Epic Similes*

The other important source of uncertainty in the narration of the first book is the proliferation of epic similes, and especially those linked by that key Miltonic word, "or." Before Satan's final address to the fallen troops, the narrative pauses a little to describe what he sees from the position he has just reached, the shore of "that inflamed sea." The narrative uses two similes to depict these "Angel Forms" as he looks back at

> His legions, Angel Forms, who lay intrans't
> Thick as Autumnal Leaves that strow the Brooks
> In *Vallombrosa*, where the *Etrurian* shades
> High overarch't imbowr; or scattered sedge

[45] William Kerrigan, *Prophetic Milton*, pp. 138–39.

> Afloat, when with fierce Winds *Orion* arm'd
> Hath vext the Red-Sea Coast, whose waves orethrew
> *Busirus* and his *Memphian* Chivalry,
> While with perfidious hatred they pursu'd
> The Sojourners of *Goshen*, who beheld
> From the safe shore thir floating carkases
> And broken Chariot Wheels, so thick bestrown
> Abject and lost lay these, covering the Flood,
> Under amazement of their hideous change.
>
> (PL 1.301–13)

The syntactic complexity of these lines is staggering. As Fish well shows, with perhaps some exaggeration, the

> simile moves from angel-form to leaves to sedge to Busiris and his Memphian Chivalry, or in typological terms (Pharaoh and Herod are the most common types of Satan) from fallen angels to fallen angels. The compression here is so complex that it defies analysis: the fallen angels as they *lie* on the burning lake (the Red Sea) are already *pursuing* the Sojourners of Goshen (Adam and Eve, the Israelites, the reader) who are for the moment *standing* on the safe shore (Paradise, the reader's chair).[46]

And it is not only the syntax, but also the values that are difficult to pin down. No one will be immune to the beauty of the first comparison, the leaves that strew the brooks under the shade of Tuscan trees in autumn. But two of those words in particular have more sinister implications: "shade" also applies to the ghosts of the underworld, parallel to this image of Hell Milton is gradually constructing, and the name "Vallombrosa," if taken etymologically (valley of shadows), suggests that widely known phrase from Psalm 23, "the valley of the shadow of death" (Gehenna, the burial ground outside the walls of Jerusalem, which lent some of its flavor to the developing notion of Hell). In fact fallen leaves are a traditional image in epic for the numberless dead.[47] But though the fallen angels themselves are in Hell, Milton's leaves are not: they are very specifically in a lovely, shady place not far from Florence, Vallombrosa, site of a

[46] Fish, *Surprised*, p. 36. The simile is variously discussed by Charles Huttar and Neil Harris in *Milton in Italy*, ed. Mario DiCesare (Binghamton: MRTS Press, 1991).

[47] Homer, *Il.* 6.146, Vergil's imitation at *Aen.* 6.309–10 for the shades of the underworld, and even more immediate, Dante's at *Inferno* 3.112–15. See C. M. Bowra, *From Virgil to Milton* (London: Macmillan, 1945), pp. 240–41. Harold Bloom's chapter on "Milton and his Precursors" in *A Map of Misreading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 125–43, offers a full and elaborate reading of these passages and their allusions as what he calls "a transumptive scheme"—that is, a process of allusion that gathers and condenses his predecessors (and they are many), overcomes the feeling of belatedness, and ultimately reverses the direction of tradition, so that "Milton and Galileo become ancients, and Homer, Virgil, Ovid, Dante, Tasso, Spenser become belated moderns" (p. 138); the essay is reprinted in Bloom, ed., *Milton* (Chelsea House), quotation p. 173.

monastery that Milton may have visited. The simile is thus layered with ambivalence, though its dominant mood is still perhaps one of nostalgic regret for the passing of summer (the angels' time in Heaven).

The comparisons continue, as is characteristic of Milton, with an "or," accumulating extra connections. Orion, the constellation that rises over a stormy season (*Aen.*, 1.535, 7.719), is next brought into the exfoliating discourse, and most appropriately because the creation of Orion (Job 9.9, cf. Amos 5.8) was held by biblical commentators, according to Fowler, to be a sign of God's power to raise tempests to execute his judgments—an interesting example of the interleaving and mutual reinforcement of biblical and classical references. But here the tempest is not the Flood but the burning marl of Hell itself.

And the parallels continue as the Red Sea reference summons the memory of the Egyptian "knights" (Chivalry) drowned as they tried to chase the Israelites for whom the Red Sea had parted. The leader of the Egyptian force, a Pharaoh, had long been identified as Satanic, since the episode at the Red Sea had itself long been described in the archetypal language of the combat myth.[48] But here again the discrepancy between simile and narrative is as striking as the parallel: Pharoah's troops were all famously slaughtered, but here the devils escape the burning marl and, once Satan concludes his fourth speech, are immediately compared to a cloud of locusts, hovering and waiting for their leader to direct their flight to the shore.

Again these are biblical locusts, the ones summoned by Moses to descend on the Pharaoh and his people in Exodus 10.12–15, and once again Milton's narrative takes a different course from the Bible. Moses' "potent Rod" (1.338) is soon to be equaled or exceeded by the "uplifted Spear / Of thir great Sultan" (1.347–48). Moses called the locusts out to attack and destroy the Egyptians, but Satan summons his troops to attain safety on the shore. All right, it is true, the goal of these troops in the story is to fly easily like a new plague once a broad highway is opened between Hell and Earth, and so proleptically the simile points to what will happen much later, as Milton's similes often do. But the immediate effect of having Satan compared in short order to Pharaoh and then his opponent Moses is surely to unpick any firm ideas we might have about where to place this Satanic figure, and how to

[48] Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, pp. 90–104. See Fowler ad loc, and with this passage cf. 12.163–96, where recur the images of Egypt, Pharaoh as a "lawless Tyrant," "River-dragon," crossing the Red Sea, and locusts. Enough images recur in structural positions such as these to suggest that Milton was consciously thinking of a text that would fold over upon itself, what, in the case of the *Iliad*, Cedric Whitman called its Geometric or pedimental structure; see his *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (New York: Norton, 1965), pp. 249–84. Fish, though (*Surprised*, p. 36), thinks the recurrence in Book 12 points to the ultimate unity of the Leviathan and fallen leaves similes themselves—apparently because the fallen angels simile is so compressed, and Satan is Leviathan. See Conclusion, section 6, below.

evaluate the unfolding narrative. At this point, at least, it is something of a relief to find Satan immediately step forward with a fine, short speech to cut through the confusion and "amazement" of the simile, ending with that ringing and alliterative line: "Awake, arise, or be for ever fall'n" (1.331).

At the same time as she argued that the "extended similes, especially combined as they are with the didactic comments, are a means of characterizing the narrative voice, of enriching his tone, of insisting on his presence and enlarging his role as our interpreter and guide," Anne Ferry tried to show that the way the similes actually work does not disturb "the desired unity of structure" but simply adds variety, ornament, and range of reference.[49] Nonetheless she was a good enough critic to allow for a certain difficulty in the way they make their meanings. "They are always presented as if to make some notion clear, as if to give illuminating information," but although the extended simile "professes to have this simple function . . . its elaboration, its self-consciousness, and its conventionality usually deny that simplicity. The pointed way in which the known term of the comparison is elaborated far beyond its resemblance to the less-familiar term denies (at the same time as it professes) the use of similes for comparison." It is not a big step from that admission to my own view, that the language of the similes disturbs the clarity of vision generally associated with similes, and therefore the authority of the voice that uses the similes.

The typical "as . . . , so . . ." structure of Homeric similes *à queue longue* is, after the invocation to the Muse, the most obvious device that asserts the epic nature of the poem. Milton clearly enjoyed them, and uses them for many and various purposes. But there are more that relate to Satan than any other topic, while there are none at all for God or the Son. We have just looked at one extended example, the set beginning with the Vallombrosa image for the fallen angels. There we noted something that is characteristic of many similes, that the initiating reason for the simile, constucting a *tertium comparationis*, as it was called by classical critics, is rarely the only point of these curious intrusions in the narrative text. Phillip Damon once showed brilliantly that Homer's similes often contrast or clash in interesting ways with the narrative context,[50] and this is even more true of Milton's. For the reader, this double nature of the simile opens basic questions of meaning.

In "Milton's Counterplot," Geoffrey Hartman argued that some of the similes, even in the early Hell books, strike a radically different note: they detach us and propose a countermovement to the dark world of damnation.[51] One

[49] Ferry, *Epic Voice*, p. 68.

[50] Phillip Damon, *Modes of Analogy in Ancient and Medieval Verse* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), pp. 261–71.

[51] Geoffrey Hartman, "Milton's Counterplot," *ELH* 25 (1958): 1–12, reprinted in Arthur Barker, ed., *Milton: Modern Essays in Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 386–97.

example is the comparison of the devils on first entering their new debating chamber (Pandaemonium) to the famous and epically traditional bees who

> In spring time, when the Sun with *Taurus* rides,
> Pour forth thir populous youth about the Hive
> In clusters; they among fresh dews and flowers
> Flie to and fro, or on the smoothed Plank,
> The suburb of thir Straw-built Cittadel,
> New rub'd with Baum, expatiate and confer
> Thir State affairs.
>
> (PL 1.768–75)

These populous, political, and parliamentary bees certainly do not enhance the idea of Satan's rule in Hell as a tyranny. And they are soon followed in this extended chain of similes by some enchanting "Faerie Elves,"

> Whose midnight Revels, by a Forrest side
> Or Fountain some belated peasant sees,
> Or dreams he sees, while over-head the Moon
> Sits Arbitress, and neerer to the Earth
> Wheels her pale course; they on thir mirth and dance
> Intent, with jocund Music charm his ear;
> At once with joy and fear his heart rebounds.
>
> (PL 1.781–89)

Perhaps a contemporary Puritan reader will be anxious about this poor "belated peasant," a prey to mysterious elves, but can we seriously worry about him in the midst of such beauty? No wonder his heart fills with joy as well as fear. The language, then, especially in the similes, often points away from the threatening and somber worlds of hell and punishment and eternal damnation, all that a jealous God would inflict on his enemies, towards another miraculously preserved world in which the idea of Paradise can retain its impact, though in a subsidiary way, and eventually be restored.

How, then, are we to "see" Hell, if the similes do not enhance either the clarity of our vision or the moral position from which we could evaluate it? This problem is posed in several of these similes. Thus the entry to Pandaemonium, that splendid variant of the epic bee simile (and then extended in Milton to pygmies), deliberately shifts our point of view, as we saw, from large to small, but also blurring our moral certainties and involving devils in the narration. "The hiss of russling wings" (1.768), that delicately onomatopoeic introduction to the bee simile, may well anticipate the later degradation of the devils in Book 10, both from the structural and the moral point of view, but it is hard even for a seasoned reader to recall that just now—and deliberately so. The beauty is not something we are obliged to put aside either, since there is

no censorious narrator to correct our vision here. Rather the beauty is a necessary part of the total impact.

The ambiguities (as usual) lie thick around.[52] That clearly ironic apostrophe, "Behold a wonder! . . . " (1.777) that introduces the sudden shrinking in perspective of the devils to dwarfs, pygmies, or elves, echoes the authoritative essay of Tasso on the appropriateness of "wonder" to epic. When we look up the passage in question, it turns out—and once we know this it is hard not to think Milton knew it, too—that Tasso's example is Cadmus, the Theban hero, transformed to a snake in Ovid. It is hard to imagine an allusion that buries more concentrated ambivalence, waiting to be unearthed. Or consider the moon in the lovely little mini-narrative about a belated peasant and faerie elves that makes up the subsequent simile. It is all very well for a commentator like Roy Flannagan to remind us that "the Roman Diana, goddess of the moon, was associated in the Renaissance with the witch Hecate and other queens of fairy kingdoms [queendoms?]," citing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 2.1.103 and *Richard II* 3.2.69, and to add that therefore "the moon as arbitress or judge would be frightening, since the moon would govern floods or tearful moods" (RM n. 225, p. 378). He is even correct to do so. But that is not what the language of this sublime simile implies or invites us to dwell on. Granted it places the reader in the position of this belated peasant, as before he may have identified with the poor sailor who was forced after dark to drop anchor on the back of the Satanic Leviathan whale, thinking it an island. But in neither case do we actually find out what happened to the poor deluded wanderers—in a sense they merely merge back into the reader as he continues his thickening experience of the poem—and the peasant at least seems to have thoroughly enjoyed himself at these "midnight Revels." Haven't we, too?

7. *Erring*

The text of *Paradise Lost* requires several readings to fully explore the paradoxes of "seeming" in passages like these—and make no mistake, it is the text itself that plays tricks with us, not just the moon and faerie elves with stray peasants. The clearest example is the language of Mulciber's (Vulcan's or Hephaestus's) fall, which Milton retains from the conclusion of the first book of Homer's *Iliad* for the conclusion of his own first book,[53] but emotionally transforms into a strangely peaceful variant of the pervasive idea of falling:

[52] Marshall Grossman analyzes these similes as "transformations from myth to nature" in *Authors to Themselves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 40–41. See also the seminal discussions of James Whaler, "The Miltonic Simile," *PMLA* 46 (1931): 1034–74, and "Animal Similes in *Paradise Lost*," *PMLA* 47 (1932): 534–53; and David P. Harding, *The Club of Hercules* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1962), pp. 94–110.

[53] For the fall of Hephaestus as a variant of Okeanos and Ophioneus, see Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, pp. 73–83: "It begins to look as if Hephaestus and Typhon were alternative adversary figures in

> and how he fell
> From Heav'n, they fabl'd, thrown by angry *Jove*
> Sheer o'er the Crystal Battlements: from Morn
> To Noon he fell, from Noon to dewy Eve,
> A Summers day; and with the setting Sun
> Dropt from the Zenith like a falling Star,
> On *Lemnos* th' *Ægæan* Ile.
>
> (PL 1.740–46)

We will note the paradoxical beauty of the language for this leisurely fall, extending over enjambments to that lovely "Dropt" at the beginning of a line and only then recalling a falling star. We might dwell further on the impulse Milton apparently obeys to accord a fellow artist, even in his fall, a beguiling lyrical sequence. But nonetheless that stern guide who is our narrator, in one voice at least, can reassert himself at will and correct our sympathies. For the passage ends, once we (and Mulciber) get to Lemnos, with a surprising but ominous reminder

> thus they relate,
> Erring; for he with this rebellious rout
> Fell long before; nor aught avail'd him now
> To have built in Heav'n high Towrs; nor did he scape
> By all his Engins, but was headlong sent
> With his industrious crew to build in hell.
>
> (PL 1.746–51)

So there! "Thus they relate, /Erring"—but so did Milton thus narrate, and so did we his trusting readers err. And this will not be the last time. This is as clear an example as one could wish of the narrative technique by which Milton gives with one hand, only to take away with the other. In narrative, though, the two do not cancel each other out, any more than a negative cancels a positive in the language of the subconscious: instead we keep the activity of both hands, though we note the uneasy relation between them.

John Leonard's *Naming in Paradise* cites a few reactions to this passage. "My good Milton! why in a passion?" asked the Victorian poet Landor in an "Imaginary Conversation" of 1846, and found no good answer. F. R. Leavis, the great Cambridge don of an earlier era, and a fierce critic of Milton, was surprised to find he had "smuggled in" a moment of finer feeling:

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the Zeus tradition, and both could be assimilated to the standing quarrel of Zeus and Hera. The story needs to be pieced together from, e.g., *Iliad* 1.591 and 18.397 and the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, lines 305–55."

> it comes in with "ancient Greece" and "Ausonian land" [Italy], and seems to be immediately due to the evocation of that serene, clear, ideally remote classical world so potent upon Milton's sensibility.[54]

And Leonard himself shows that it is not only the emotion that may mislead, or even the relation of classical mythology to biblical truth, but the basic facts of the text. In spite of the impression conveyed by "Nor was his name unheard or unador'd / In ancient Greece" (1.738–39), only his Roman name is given, not his Greek one (Hephaestus). This led the eighteenth-century editor, Richard Bentley, to comment:

> This is carelessly expressed. Why does he not tell his name in Greece, as well as his Latin name? And Mulciber was not so common a name as Vulcan.[55]

And Geoffrey Hartman, usually a close and sensitive reader, here errs himself: "Milton's description of the building of Pandemonium ends with a reference to the architect, Mammon, also known to the ancient world as Mulciber."[56] In fact Mammon is the miner of material for the palace, not it's architect, though it is true he has just been mentioned a few lines before (1.678–80). Milton is very careful, as Leonard well shows, over the question of how the devils are named and when: they got their modern names only after the fall from heaven, when they took on their new roles as pagan gods. Beelzebub, for example, as we have been told when he was first addressed in the poem, may well have been next to Satan in power, but we do not actually know his original name, only the one he acquired later:

> One next himself in power, and next in crime.
> Long after known in *Palestine*, and nam'd *Beelzebub*.
> (PL 1.79–81)

And Satan does not name him when he speaks to him. Indeed he is not even sure, as we have seen, who he is, so changed is he from the angel he knew in heaven.

Some of that Satanic uncertainty, I have tried to argue here, communicates itself to the text, and to the narrator. It may account in part for the strident tone of that "Erring." The narrator needs to reassert his authority, to distinguish what the sounds of the text were in danger of blending ("to have built in Heav'n," "to build in Hell").

How bad a mistake was it, after all? The timing and sense of chronology

[54] F. R. Leavis, *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry*. (London: Chatto and Windus 1936), p. 45.

[55] Richard Bentley, ed., *Milton's* Paradise Lost: *A New Edition* (London: Jacob Tenson, 1732), p. 33, cited in Leonard, *Naming*, p. 84.

[56] Hartman, "Counterplot," p. 386.

was wrong, since it was a long-established idea that the ancients had worshipped these devils as their pagan gods, but the story itself, it seems, was true. The dramatic placing of the word "Erring" at the beginning of its line is a little too eloquent, though it accords with, even emphasizes, the punitive desire the voice betrays here: the epic predecessors erred, and the devils about whom they erred did not just fall from heaven, they were sent headlong to hell.

8. *Parliamentary Devils*

Book 2 may be expected to extend the series of narratorial interventions to the other leading devils who make speeches during the parliamentary conclave in Pandaemonium. Not all the devils, however, get anything like the same treatment. Perhaps because his "sentence is for open Warr" (2.51) and he thus takes on the standard epic role of an Ajax, Moloch is introduced by an admiring little sketch that shows he is not taken altogether seriously: he is "the strongest and the fiercest Spirit / That fought in Heav'n; now fiercer by despair" (2.44–45)—a phrase that should register powerfully with those readers who were not immune to Satan's "deep despare" in the first book. And he is fearless now: "of God, or Hell, or worse / He reck'd not." What, one wonders, could be worse for him than Hell—or God? Neither is Moloch's speech revised by an intrusive narrator afterwards: we are simply told how he frowned and that "his look denounc'd / Desperate revenge, and Battel dangerous / To less than Gods" (2.106–8). But now uprises Belial, and the narrator's discourse anxiously surrounds his apparently convincing argument that the devils should not try to continue their open war with Heaven, as Moloch has proposed. Belial was described as if he were a soft and despised Royalist already in Book 1:

> Darkens the Streets, then wander forth the Sons
> *Belial* came last, than whom a Spirit more lewd
> Fell not from Heaven, or more gross to love
> Vice for it self; . . .
> . . . . . .
> In Courts and Palaces he also Reigns
> And in luxurious Cities, where the noyse
> Of riot ascends above thir loftiest Towrs,
> And injury and outrage: And when Night
> Darkens the Streets, then wander forth the Sons
> Of *Belial*, flown with insolence and wine.
>
> (PL 1.490–505)

That final zeugma deserves to be one of the best-known instances of that figure in English, but what is striking about the character sketch is its hostility:

he is, as Flannagan puts it, "the epitome of everything a good Puritan should despise," and Milton seems to have a fascination with him (RM n. 158, p. 369).[57] Here in 2.121–226 his argument is said to be especially persuasive, such that it would take a trained debater to see how to pick holes in his case. The narrator feels the need to warn us, and in advance this time, that

> all was false and hollow; though his Tongue
> Dropt Manna, and could make the worse appear
> The better reason, to perplex and dash
> Maturest Counsels: for his thoughts were low;
> To vice industrious, but to Nobler deeds
> Timorous and slothful: yet he pleas'd the ear,
> And with perswasive accent thus began.
>
> (PL 2.112–18)

And indeed Belial now makes a very long speech in these persuasive accents, proposing what sounds a lot like peace, and no doubt that is why the narrator feels obliged to denounce his speech further at the end as "words cloath'd in reasons garb" (2.226), like that of any self-respecting Sophist.

But is the alternative so unreasonable, despite the narrator's mock-Platonic denunciation? Given that the devils are, and seem here at least to know they are, condemned to endless suffering, the narrator's warning may be beside the point. Belial recognizes sensibly that God is unlikely to change his sentence of damnation, but thinks that if the devils do not offend further he may be "satisfi'd / With what is punish't" (2.212–13) and that in time they will not feel their torments. After all, are they not better off now, in this politic conclave, than they were "Chain'd on the burning Lake"? There may not be much nobility or martial courage in Belial's argument,[58] as there has been in Satan's, but since the narrator has denounced Satanic heroism, it may be thought a little unfair of him to attack the opposite as well. He may himself think that

[57] William B. Hunter, "Belial's Presence," cited in RM (n. 158, p. 369; n. 25, p. 384) makes the interesting point that he is intrusive in the catalogue where he lies, since he should be among the Palestinian Gods, earlier, not between the Egyptian and Greek ones, and so Milton may have added these lines later. The passage continues with another reference that preoccupied Milton, the homosexual sodomy in Judges 19: "Witness the streets of *Sodom*, and that night / In *Gibeah*, when the hospitable door / Expos'd a Matron to avoid worse rape." Homosexual rape, it seems, is worse than heterosexual, even though in this case the maidservant left defenseless outside the door was raped, then cut to pieces by her Levite husband/lover. Milton may have recogized that the episode had too strong a hold on his imagination, and was more complex than he admitted: he tinkered with the text, changing "prevent" to "avoid," and correcting the plural "Matrons" (but the word in the Authorized Version is "concubine"). See Michael Lieb, *Milton and the Culture of Violence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), chap. 5, and the further discussion in Fowler (2d ed.), ad loc.

[58] When Belial introduces the point that their sufferings may prove less with time, he is careful to say that he despises those who, having launched on the kind of war these angels have just fought, are unwilling to accept the consequences of defeat (2.199–208). Is that reason, or "reason's garb"?

Belial counsels "ignoble ease, and peaceful sloath, / Not peace," but it would be interesting to hear (and we do not) of what this genuine "peace" might consist, given what Belial and his fellows have recently been living through, and that they are damned to all eternity.

The next speech, Mammon's, follows immediately, without preamble. Curiously, it offers another version of what Belial has been saying, though he makes it sound different, preferring "Hard liberty before the easie yoke / Of servile Pomp" (2.256–57)—but was that what Belial said?[59] Mammon, too, counsels adapting to Hell, and thus prefers peace to war. He also offers his own version of the "good from evil" pattern that informs the whole poem.[60]

> Our greatness will appeer
> Then most conspicuous, when great things of small,
> Useful of hurtful, prosperous of adverse
> We can create, and in what place so e're
> Thrive under evil, and work ease out of pain
> Through labour and indurance. This deep world
> Of darkness do we dread? How oft amidst
> Thick clouds and dark doth heav'ns all-ruling Sire
> Choose to reside, his Glory unobscur'd,
> And with the Majesty of darkness round
> Covers his Throne; from whence deep thunders roar
> Must'ring thir rage, and Heav'n resembles Hell?
> As he our darkness, cannot we his Light
> Imitate when we please? This Desart soile
> Wants not her hidden lustre, Gemms and Gold;
> Nor want we skill or art, from whence to raise
> Magnificence; and what can Heav'n shew more?
> Our torments also may in length of time
> Become our Elements, these piercing Fires
> As soft as now severe, our temper chang'd
> Into their temper; which must needs remove
> The sensible of pain. All things invite
> To peaceful Counsels.
>
> (PL 2.257–79)

[59] If Hunter is right (see n. 57, above) and Belial's speech is an afterthought, then it is even easier to detach this phrase from what Belial had said.

[60] Cf. 1.162–65, where Satan says "If then his Providence / Out of our evil seek to bring forth good / Our labour must be to pervert that end / And out of good still to find means of evil," on which Peter Weston, *Paradise Lost*, Penquin Critical Studies (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990) comments, p. 33, that "the 'Fortunate Fall' is thus a doctrine Satan knows all about"; 2.14–16 (a Satanic parody of the idea); or 2.385–86: "But thir spite still serves / His glory to augment."

At the end of this speech, the narrator does not comment: rather the speech has scarce ended when the devils react with applause. True the sound of the applause is compared to the murmur of wind after a tempest that lulls tired sailors once they have found anchor. But that is subtle, and we are not told whether the sailors come to harm. No, the devils' reaction to the speech is the most powerful comment possible. These devils want peace. And a chance to work. Again, the post–Civil War generation of Milton's contemporaries will have understood and sympathized.

What then is the difference from Belial that provoked all the narrator's ire for him? Mammon is more positive than Belial, certainly, the Industrialist rather than the Lawyer, as Empson characterized them.[61] Whereas Belial had argued for a Stoic acceptance of their fate, Mammon argues they can improve their world, imitating Heaven's light in Hell, "to raise / Magnificence." It is a policy not merely of endurance, but of labor and endurance (2.262). Just as Milton's Paradise is unusual in that it requires Adam and Eve to work to keep it up, so his Hell can be improved with appropriate labor. And the fiend who says so is applauded, while the narrator, in striking contrast to his presentation of Belial, refrains from comment.

Does this mean his speech meets with approval, uniting the voices of narrator and devil, since it means genuine peace? The various proposals of devils in their "great conclave" (Moloch, Belial, Mammon, Beelzebub) remind us of the parliamentary system Milton knew well (like Andrew Marvell, also a poet-politician). There is something akin here to the democratic politics of the time, and Milton shows a sympathetic fascination with it, more than with the autocratic politics of Heaven.[62] Mammon is so convincing that he must be quickly counteracted by the rapid intervention of Beelzebub, a standard parliamentary maneuver of Beelzebub/Satan. The plan to colonize and corrupt the newly created Earth and inhabitants (as rumor has it), is advanced by Beelzebub, but "whence / but from the author of all ill" (2.380–81) could such an idea have come? Satan is here the consummate politician manipulating a parliamentary assembly.[63] And the plot is indeed diabolical. But the moralist we have for a narrator is fighting a losing battle if he wants us to withdraw that fascinated admiration from this great manipulator. Indeed the speeches are set up in such a way that the plan is immediately seen to have the kind of intellectual brilliance we admire: it comes in at the appropriate moment to solve an apparently insoluble problem—how to continue the struggle without open war.

[61] Empson, *Milton's God*, pp. 48–53.

[62] Diana Treviño Benet makes this case, in "Hell, Satan, and the New Politician," in Benet and Lieb, *Literary Milton*, pp. 91–112.

[63] The plot between Beelzebub and Satan develops through 2.299–330, 343–45, 367 ("punie"), 379–85, 402–415, 432, and 450. For the political context, see chap. 1, n. 89, above.

The difference between the narrator's attitudes to the kinds of endurance advocated by Belial and Mammon is hard to account for unless we factor in Milton's own preoccupations. Effeminate slackness is a temptation to be fought against at every turn, while hard work is so eminently praiseworthy that it needs no comment. Yet the effect of this way of telling the tale is to reveal a narrator so curiously engaged by his characters that he cannot treat them objectively.

Indeed given the logic of what I have just written, it would seem that a narrator really interested in guiding his reader towards accurate reading would have intervened rather to show us the error of Mammon's ways, to bring us in, as it were, with our palmer through the cave of Mammon.[64] Instead it takes a Stanley Fish, never loathe to substitute himself for the unaccountably silent narrator, to point out Mammon's flaws in a splendid passage added for the second edition of *Surprised by Sin*. Aligning himself with the standard Augustinian distinction between *cupiditas* and *caritas*—that is, between what he calls "two internal orientations," the one "toward the forms of created nature, . . . the other toward the primacy and grandeur of the creator"—he goes on to note that

> the exemplar of the first orientation is Mammon who is described when we first meet him as "the least erected Spirit that fell / From heav'n, for ev'n in heav'n his looks and thoughts / Were always downward bent, admiring more / The riches of Heav'n's pavement, trod'n Gold / Than aught divine or holy else enjoy'd / In vision beatific" (I 679–84). Mammon is faulted not for admiring Heaven's riches but for admiring them in and for themselves and not as signs of the power ("divine or holy else") that made them. In his eyes they are riches that just happened to be in Heaven rather than *Heaven's* riches. It is their "lustre" (II 271) not their source that impresses him, and that is why he is so pleased to find that same lustre in the "gems and gold" of Hell's soil. "What can Heav'n show more?" (273), he asks, making it as plain as could be that "show" names the limit of his perception even as it names his desire.[65]

This is first-rate literary criticism. But why then does Fish have to explain, since Milton's narrator has not been shy to take on the task himself? Could it

[64] In a famous mistake, Milton misremembered Spenser's narrative, which he used as an example of a poet's need to expose his character to temptation that he may learn to resist: "which was the reason why our sage and serious poet *Spencer*, whom I dare be known to think a better teacher than *Scotus* or *Aquinas*, describing true temperance under the person of *Guion*, brings him in with his palmer through the cave of Mammon, and the bowr of earthly blisse, that he might see and know, and yet abstain" (PM p. 288, YP 2.516). In fact, though the palmer does accompany Guyon in Acrasia's bower, he has no such guide for the cave of Mammon. So Milton silently corrects his mistake in the poem, giving the reader no guidance for his journey through the speech of Mammon.

[65] Fish, *Surprised*, pp. xv–xvi.

be that, apart from the odd giveaway that Fish so capably points to, he does not really want us to consider his Mammon so analytically? Rather he wants us to *side with* Mammon? The previous speech, Belial's, was the one he was so careful to have us analyze, and the next one, Beelzebub's, is the one that initiates the action of the poem at the human level, and is truly Satanic. But Mammon's speech, advising peace, as the narrator explicitly says (and not, be it noted, "peaceful sloath," that lovely word), has nothing about it to be questioned: on the contrary, we may say in retrospect (which is our usual perspective in this poem), if only he had carried the day! Thus, however the narrator's moralizing about riches may have identified them as the precious bane of hell the first time we meet Mammon, here in Book 2 the narrator identifies with his point of view, and allows the reader to do so as well. It is a curious reversal from that passage about the "least erected Spirit" and "the riches of Heav'ns pavement" in Book 1. All the more so, since the narrator risked a serious problem in the characterization of Mammon: what in Heaven, after all, was Mammon doing looking only on the pavement when he was an unfallen spirit? The psychological realism of the character, the suggestion of his endemic avarice, implies a serious clash with logic: it was not occasionally that he glanced down in admiration at the golden pavement, but "always."[66] And this particular wording would be hard to account for by the Fishean maneuver of transferring the contradiction to that desperately sinful reader.

At the very least, then, we can say that the narrator is not always consistent in his comments, or in the point of view he invites us to adopt. Here at least, despite (or because of?) the denunciation of Belial, he leaves us very close to Mammon.

[66] See Swardson, *Fountain of Light* pp. 110–12, for a fine discussion of this and related problems in the poem, which he attributes to the conflict between literary and religious requirements.

THREE

FOLLOW THE LEADER

Wrecked, solitary, here.
—EMILY DICKINSON, 280

The adversarial relation between narrator and Satan is less insistent and even harder to discern after the Hell scenes of the opening books. And indeed the authority of the narrator, as I have tried to show, may itself be questioned. The poem even encourages us to do so. There is a curious example to which Stanley Fish (unfortunately for his argument) calls attention in the preface to the second edition of *Surprised By Sin*. He calls it "an apparently small moment in Book II." Satan has just thrown himself into the "wilde Abyss" (2.910) and begun his journey to our world when he "hits a deep air pocket, a 'vast vacuity' [932]":

> all unawares
> Fluttring his pennons vain plumb down he drops
> Ten thousand fadom deep, and to this hour
> Down had been falling, had not by ill chance
> The strong rebuff of som tumultuous cloud
> Instinct with Fire and Nitre hurried him
> As many miles aloft.
>
> (PL 2.932–38)

Fish thinks Milton makes a lot of this mini-adventure in order to allow the reader to connect it "strongly to the poem's central (and foreknown) event." If Satan had not been propelled upward by that cloud, he would never have got to Eden, tempted Adam and Eve, and everything would be still all right.

> In short, if he were still falling ("to this hour") they would not have fallen, and we should not ourselves be falling now. A reader who falls in with this line of reasoning will have done more than make an inference from one point in the poem to another: he or she will have imagined (conceived) the universe as one in which the outcome of events turns on accidents—good or ill chance—rather than on the exercise of moral choice and moral choice alone.[1]

There is rather more in this vein. Opportunities to get it all wrong crop up all the time, in fact "*whenever anything happens*" (xlix, italics Fish's).

[1] Fish, *Surprised*, 2d ed. (1997), pp. xlvii–viii.

Anything? Narrative itself, it seems, is a temptation, and indeed Fish more or less admits this.[2] With an admission like that, I suppose my small objection will seem insignificant: this story of ill chance rather than a choice that we are invited to make is one *the narrator of the poem is telling* (my italics: two can play at that game). And he doesn't then come in to say "Aha! Gotcha!" No, he simply attributes the action of the turbulent cloud to ill chance, and then carries on. So who, then, is peddling the "moral-choice-is-all" line, what Fish calls, following Steven Fallon, Milton's "monism"? At this point at least, it seems it is Fish reading against that authoritative narrator whom elsewhere he so religiously follows. Now I am quite prepared to admit that Milton often urges "one perspective at the expense of others" (xli) in many of the interpretive cruces of the poem, and even that, as Catherine Belsey says of one of the two conflicting worldviews she finds in the poem, Milton seeks to impose a "despotism" of Truth by identifying it with only one of the voices whose energies the verse lets loose.[3] What I am not prepared to admit is that one can simply assert what that voice means, as Fish does here, at the expense of what it actually says: "ill chance" is allowed into the complex structure of the narrative by the narrator or epic voice itself, and no amount of legislative commentary will wish it out. Like many great critics, Samuel Johnson or T. S. Eliot for example, Stanley Fish has pushed his argument to the point where it reveals its own absurdity.

One important reason for the change in the epic voice from its earlier adversarial relation to Satan is that the narrative quickly moves into an Odyssean mode from its Iliadic, speechifying opening. Our point of view necessarily comes closer to Satan's as he begins his heroic voyage towards the earth. Much of what becomes visible to the reader is what Satan sees. This "curious alliance between Satan and Milton" is not exactly a moral or intellectual alliance but derives from "their shared condition as observers of events."[4] Most readers take note of the problem this poses when we finally enter the Garden of Eden and meet our first parents, but this mingling of points of view actually begins earlier, and it certainly makes difficult the distance necessary to a monologic evaluation. It begins in fact as Satan's voyage into Chaos begins.

1. *Chaos*

In *Paradise Lost* Chaos is both the source of all the matter that God uses to make the universe ("The Womb of nature and perhaps her Grave"; 2.911, a phrase that translates Lucretius's *De rerum natura* 5.259, *omniparens eadem rerum*

[2] Stanley Fish, "Discovery as Form in *Paradise Lost*," reprinted as Appendix 2 in *Surprised By Sin*, 2d ed., p. 344.

[3] Catherine Belsey, *John Milton: Language, Gender, Power* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 84, and cited in Fish, p. xli.

[4] Richard Bradford, *Paradise Lost*, p. 31.

commune sepulcrum, and also a lurking and potentially hostile force, monstrous and untamed. The ability to control Chaos is a primary sign of God's power and a key political idea: Hobbes had invoked "the first Chaos of Violence and Civill Warre" in *Leviathan* (1651), precisely to deplore the consequences of rebellion against the monarch.[5] But Milton's Chaos is also an independent being, personified as a cosmic character whom Satan meets on his journey. In this respect he seems to reactivate the mythical root latent in the biblical *tehōm*, cognate with the Tiamat who is the embodiment of chaos in Babylonian myth and the enemy who must be defeated for order and the rule of Marduk to be established.[6] Milton could not have known about her, since she only re-emerged from her long sleep during the brave work of nineteenth-century archaeologists. But traces of the combat myths of the ancient Near East remain in the biblical language, enough to spark Milton's narrative imagination even if he had not had the guidance of Hesiod and Vergil (who invokes, even prays to, Chaos and Phlegethon as Aeneas enters the underworld; *Aeneid* 6.265). So, combining the biblical Chaos tradition with the classical,[7] Milton's Chaos is both potential enemy and the hostile space that Satan must cross. Various kinds of confusion are associated with Chaos, then, who is at different times person, place, or ground of being: no wonder the narrative vision gets blurred as we follow Satan's journey.[8]

Satan pauses on the brink of the abyss as he begins his journey away from Hell. Commentators since the eighteenth century have noticed how, in the words of Richardson, "the Poet Himself seems to be Doing what he Describes, for the Period begins at 910. Then he goes not On Directly, but Lingers; giving an Idea of *Chaos* before he Enters into it."[9] As John Creaser puts it,

> Milton's unpredictability of rhythm and syntax takes us kinaesthetically into the energies and struggles of the fiend. At the sentence beginning "Into this wild abyss," ll. 910–20, the syntax stalls for line after line while the nature of chaos is explored in subordinate clauses heaped together "confusedly" (914), until at last the opening phrase returns and the syntax

[5] Cited by John Rumrich, *Milton Unbound*, p. 125.

[6] Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, pp. 44–50, and chap. 1, above. Regina Schwartz, *Remembering and Repeating: Biblical Creation in* Paradise Lost (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 28–39, uses the myth as a template to measure Milton.

[7] See Bernhard Anderson, *Creation Versus Chaos* (New York: Association Press, 1967) and Cohn, *Cosmos*.

[8] In the view of John Rumrich, the figure of Chaos gives a mythological and symbolic grounding for the various kinds of indeterminacy of meaning in the poem—the crossing of so many boundaries through excesses of interpretation and of passion. Rumrich cites in the description of Paradise that marvellous phrase, "enormous bliss," reminding us that "enormous" means "out of rule, beyond the norm or limit," p. 132.

[9] Quoted in Christopher Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style*, p. 79; this is the book that, inspired in part by Empson's use of Bentley, recovered these commentators for the modern reader.

resumes: we share directly the experience of "the wary fiend" in his perturbed hesitation on the very brink of hell.[10]

Richardson's 1734 comment records his observation that six lines of parenthetical and Lucretian musing on Chaos intervene before the verse returns to Satan. Even then there is a mild surprise, since Satan still does not complete the movement implied by "into"; rather he "Stood" (as Bentley in 1732 irascibly pointed out). The next verb completes the syntax properly (he looked into the abyss) but still doesn't give us the jump we've been waiting for.

> Into this wilde Abyss,
> The Womb of nature and perhaps her Grave,
> Of neither Sea, nor Shore, nor Air, nor Fire,
> But all these in thir pregnant causes mixt
> Confus'dly, and which thus must ever fight,
> Unless th' Almighty Maker them ordain
> His dark materials to create more Worlds,
> Into this wild Abyss the warie fiend
> Stood on the brink of Hell and look'd a while,
> Pondering his Voyage.
>
> (PL 2.910–19)

Although the repetition of "into this wild Abyss" leads the reader to expect that the movement anticipated by the preposition "into" will now happen, the jump doesn't actually come until line 929, where the long wait is stressed by the words that open the sentence:

> At last his Sail-broad Vannes
> He spreads for flight, and in the surging smoak
> Uplifted spurns the ground.
>
> (PL 2.927–29)

As the authors of *Reading Poetry* comment: "These lines exhibit that close relationship between form and meaning which readers have often felt to be one of the desirable, if not definitive, characteristics of poetic language. . . . Milton can be said to be making the form *significant*."[11] The particular significance it takes on here is that it brings the Satanic hesitation directly into the narrative and makes it textual. The reader cannot but experience it as Satan does.

Just as pygmy devils, or the telescope, deliberately introduced early into the narrative, disturb our vision and sense of perspective or proportion, so the noise of Chaos performs the same function for the ear. "Blasting noise assaults

[10] John Creaser, "Prosodic Style and Conceptions of Liberty in Milton and Marvell," *Milton Quarterly* 34 (2000): 1–13.

[11] Tom Furniss and Michael Bath, *Reading Poetry: an Introduction* (Harlow: Prentice Hall, 1996), p. 55.

Satan's ear like the seige of a city in time of war,"[12] repeating the recent trauma of civil war for the first readers of the poem.

> Nor was his eare less peal'd
> With noises loud and ruinous (to compare
> Great things with small) then when *Bellona* storms,
> With all her battering Engines bent to rase
> Som Capital City; or less then if this frame
> Of Heav'n were falling, and these Elements
> In mutinie had from her Axle torn
> The stedfast Earth.
>
> (PL 2.920–27)

It is with a sense of relief (and gratitude), surely, that one reaches that fine phrase "the stedfast Earth." Such resting places stud the narrative of the Chaos journey, but one must, like Satan, earn them. The noise of Chaos here is first compared to what all will have known first-hand before it is magnified to become the disruption of the earth's "Axle," the *axis mundi* of countless myths.[13] On this passage Stevie Davies' comment is worth repeating:

> Milton's susceptibility to loud noise is attested by his biographers: it is the converse of his delicate and highly wrought attunement to the harmonies of music and poetry, and latterly was no doubt reinforced by the compensatory adaptation of his other senses to blindness. Sound is the material in which the poet works. Aggressive, undifferentiated noise is attended with a horror which threatens the foundations of life itself for the poet of *Paradise Lost*, as the autobiographical invocation to Book VII makes clear. The modern world is recorded as a Bacchanalian festival of "barbarous dissonance" (32) . . . and a "savage clamour" (36), capable of deranging the patterned control of the poet's song: the Restoration court and government bring up the lawless fury that impelled the Maenads to destroy Orpheus.

Davies is too good a critic not to make the next and obvious step consciously, for of course it is not Milton's experience which is being described in the Chaos passage, but Satan's. "In his experience of cacophonously invasive sound as in many other ways, Satan's journey though Chaos implies Milton's journey."

The similarity of Satan and the Milton who dramatizes his own narration has been noted by countless readers, and variously explained.[14] The most ob-

[12] Stevie Davies, *Milton* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 129.

[13] See Hilda R. Ellis Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), pp. 190–96, and Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (London and New York: Sheed and Ward, 1958; reprinted Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), pp. 273–86, 327–30, and *Shamanism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 269–74.

[14] See, for example, Riggs, *Christian Poet*, chap. 1, pp 15–45, and above, chap. 2, n. 35.

vious of these parallels results from Milton's decision to have his narrator fly. Anne Ferry notes with memorable consonance that the epic voice is divided into bird and bard, but never calls attention to the most obvious effect of giving him wings. The decision was not unprecedented. Although Dante the pilgrim seems to walk or climb everywhere, the romantic Renaissance epic of Boiardo or Ariosto, imitating Lucian, was fond of having characters fly about. Nonetheless it is a striking departure from classical epic, where the relation of poet to Muse is one of modesty: Homer begins the *Iliad*'s catalog of ships, for example, by invoking the Muses who know all things, while we have heard only a rumor (*kleos*) and know nothing (*Iliad* 2.485–86). Hesiod's Muses live on Helicon, but he cannot go there: they have to come to him. Modesty of this kind Milton abandoned at the same time as the classical Muse herself, now only an empty dream. And with his wings, Milton also put on Satan's boundless Faustian ambition. His song is adventurous, and he intends with no middle flight to soar above the Aonian mount, and aspires to sing of things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.

Far from allowing his unconscious identification with Satan to slip out unawares, as the Blake tradition would have it ("of the Devils party without knowing it"), Milton invites us "to compare his portrait of the poet with his portrait of Satan. The similarities are not hidden; the differences are consciously and carefuly defined."[15] Writing *Paradise Lost* was a presumptuous thing to do, he admits (7.13), and he wants to ward off the potential punishment by anticipating it. He wants to ride Pegasus—a Renaissance commonplace for poetic inspiration since he had created the Muses' spring on Helicon, Hippocrene (horse spring), with a stamp of his hoof—but not to suffer the fate of one of his riders, Bellerophon (7.4–20). Indeed, being Milton, he claims to soar above the Olympian hill, and even "Above the flight of *Pegasean* wing" (7.4). It is no surprise that he also feels the need to pray for safety as he imagines himself descending from this Empyreal flight to his "Native Element" (7.16).[16]

The relation of Satan's flight to Milton's is also structural. Satan's journey through Chaos is punctuated, interrupted almost, by the narrator's visit to Heaven, where he takes us in to meet the inhabitants, God and Son and angels. Indeed Satan's journey is presented as the occasion for this divine interlude. Satan flies by and looks up to Heaven, "once his native Seat" (2.1050). This requires our friendly Miltonic narrator to make a new prayer-like invocation to the God-Muse, acknowledging the new space we now enter: "Hail holy Light, ofspring of Heav'n first-born," an invocation that at first, given its placing, may seem to be Satan's. The prayer expresses a recurrent anxiety about the representation of divinity: "May I express thee unblam'd?" By mak-

[15] Riggs, *Christian*, p. 17.

[16] Kerrigan, *Prophetic Milton*, pp. 125–61, discusses these anxieties.

ing an image of God and the Son, the poet may be violating the long tradition, stemming from the Old Testament, of making no "graven images" of one's God, as the original inhabitants of Israel, the Canaanites, did, and as Milton's Puritan colleagues believed the Roman Catholic and Established Anglican churches did. The narrator is also anxious, it soon appears, that his representation of Hell ("the *Stygian* Pool") may have contaminated him, given the overlapping of images for poet and Satan. The narrator's anxiety here should alert the reader to the dangers of this order of narration: have we, too, been contaminated by the Hellish parodies, such that we cannot recognize the real thing when we see it in Heaven? Is that why we usually find Hell more interesting? Or is it that we may tend to exaggerate the differences, forgetting what Mammon tells his fellows, that "Heav'n resembles Hell" (2.268)?

This *prooimion* invokes various poetic antecedents. Orpheus is the particular model he wants to avoid following, since although Orpheus managed to go down to Hell and emerge again, just as Milton is now doing, he lost his beloved Eurydice, the goal of his quest, and was eventually torn apart by crazed Bacchic maenads, women who had lost their reason in the worship of the wine– and ecstasy-god. Milton recurs to this fear in the next invocation, Book 7.[17] Now, on the face of it, this particular Orphic parallel is not relevant to the Miltonic narrator's activity: telling the story of Genesis is hardly the same as pining for his lost beloved and so rejecting the company of women, Ovid's apparent reason for their revenge. Yet Orpheus was regarded as an ancient bard whose songs, like Milton's, were cosmogonic,[18] and the self-portrait Milton paints here, seeking the succor of his female Muse (*Urania* as she is called in Book 7), helps to make the parallel with Orpheus stronger: it also aligns both poets with the Satan who had callously turned away from his consort Sin (a story we have just heard), and later with the Adam who abandons Eve, reluctantly before the Fall, angrily after.

Even in its chief point, the darkness of the Stygian pool and the darkness in which Milton's blindness obliges him to live, this invocation recalls the voyaging Satan: both Satan and Milton use the formulaic "*Chaos* and *ancient Night*"

[17] Rachel Falconer, *Orpheus Dis(re)membered* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), pp. 108–32, shows how the references to Orpheus complicate and undermine the narrator's authority, and create considerable distance from the source of authority and judgment, the Light itself. Falconer also makes extensive use of Bakhtin in an effort to answer Christine Froula's argument that, "by constructing his Muse as his God, Milton creates a mutually confirming relation between his poetic authority and divine authority." She also argues that, though the first invocation adopts an exalted, Homeric stance towards the subject, the other invocations, particularly that of Book 3, establish a rather different image, following "Bakhtin's concept of a 'screen of the other's soul'. . . . His task (to become a hero) is to make himself answerable to both reader and the character he has created. He does this by projecting himself against his other, the muse" (115–16).

[18] On 3.17, Fowler suggests that "the allusion is especially apt in view of the common ground between the Orphic cosmogony and the account of the court of Chaos at the end of the last book."

(2.970), "*Chaos* and *Eternal Night*" (3.18), and Satan himself describes that place, wonderfully, as "The dark unbottom'd infinite Abyss" and as "the palpable obscure" (2.405–6). Furthermore his feet are "wandring" (2.404), and Milton proudly announces that "not the more / Cease I to wander where the Muses haunt" (3.26–27). Satan is "Alone thus wandring" (3.667), while Milton, of course, hopes for, prays for, the Muses' company. Yet at the moment he uses that phrase, in Book 3, Satan is about to address Uriel in "an unmistakable, though bombastic, echo of a Miltonic invocation," especially the invocation to "Holy Light" that opens the same book. Riggs concludes his list of parallels by explaining that,

> recognizing the audacity of his own high poetic aspirations he wishes to distinguish them clearly from the kind of aspiring he sees as satanic. He is after the contrast, but he does not wish to gain it by slighting the similarities. On the contrary, the more clearly he can see and project the similarities between poet and Satan, the more sure he can be that he has not been blinded by pride.[19]

If we turn the prism, however, away from whatever the poet might be trying to achieve for his own private salvation to what the reader may thus be invited to perceive, then the insistent similarities of language extend the sense we already have of a potentially Satanic narration. The effect is often to identify the two perspectives.

Indeed the journey through Chaos unsettles the whole narrative and it only recovers its bearings with some difficulty. Consider the way the image of the Leviathan simile, which figures the bulk of Satan with its deluded sailor (1.200–208), is picked up again during the voyage. A similar delusive image is used in Book 3, this time for the uncertain footing Satan finds as he arrives in our world. God

> then survey'd
> Hell and the Gulf between, and *Satan* there
> Coasting the wall of Heav'n on this side Night
> In the dun Air sublime, and ready now
> To stoop with wearied wings, and willing feet
> On the bare outside of this World, that seem'd
> Firm land imbosom'd without Firmament,
> Uncertain which, in Ocean or in Air.
>
> (PL 3.69–76)

This world seems, like the Leviathan, firm land. But is it? What, in fact, is "this World"? As in 2.1052 ("This pendant world"), it must mean the outside

[19] Riggs, *Christian*, pp. 22–25. Cf. McMahon, *Two Poets*, pp. 38–43, a fine discussion.

of our universe, not the Earth: Satan doesn't arrive there (here) until after his encounter with Uriel at the end of Book 3, when he alights on Mount Niphates. In this passage, then, Satan is apparently still outside the newly created universe. Leonard ad loc says that "without" means "both 'on the outside of' and 'not having'. The *land* on the outside of our *firmament* is unsheltered by any firmament. The oxymoron *imbosomed without* implies the vulnerability of a universe imbosomed in nothing but itself." That is well said. It also shows how the text moves us around rather rapidly as we try to picture this scene, firm land or firmament, from any stable position. And the phrase "this World" is confusing. In a few lines God speaks of this "new created World, / And Man there plac't" (3.89–90), which sounds more like that small part of "this World" where we live, the Earth.

Fowler allows that "in Chaos the usual categories are confused," but even more so, the passage involves the reader in the confusion. We are not sure anymore than he where Satan is supposed to be now; the syntax of the passage leaves open the point of view. "This World" implies it is ours, but the immediate context gives Satan as the character to whom it "seem'd Firm land," since he is obviously looking for somewhere to land or anchor (is it Ocean or Air?). And then we realize with perhaps a small shock, that the one who is actually surveying all this is God. Could it be that he is the one who is "Uncertain"? Grammatically we could argue, as does Hughes ad loc, that this is "an impersonal and absolute contruction," but he adds an explanation: "it is uncertain, hard to see, whether Chaos around the floating universe is more like water or like air." But the passage does not say the universe is floating. That's from the Leviathan simile. By virtue of its uncertain syntax, we might say, the text here makes a curious alignment of reader, Satan, and God.[20]

This uncertainty continues, leaving Satan suspended until the narrative finally returns to him in line 418, where the physical situation is (somewhat) clarified. Even then, the delaying syntax makes him wait before he actually hits ground, between "upon" and "alighted":

> Mean while upon the firm opacous Globe
> Of this round World, whose first convex divides
> The luminous inferior Orbs, enclos'd
> From *Chaos* and th' inroad of Darkness old,
> *Satan* alighted walks.
>
> (PL 3.418–22)

[20] The uncertainty is also moral: while it persists, Satan seeing the far distant heaven can be likened to the Jacob who saw angels climbing up and down the stairs of heaven (3.510–15). Ricks is inclined to "deprecate the passage (however beautiful), since it would seem to suggest either that Satan is good, or that Jacob is bad" (*Milton's Grand Style*, p. *128*). Newlyn, however, thinks Milton is "compelled by the thought of Satan and Jacob becoming one" (*Romantic Reader*, p. 81), while Flannagan (RM, n. 136, p. 431) well points out that the famous biblical image ocuurs just after Jacob has cheated his brother of his birthright (Genesis 28.12–13).

But "alighted" turns out not to be the main verb: it is a past participle. The event has already happened, and now he "walks." And where, in fact, is he walking? Once more there is a sudden and disconcerting shift of perspective:

> a Globe farr off
> It seem'd, now seems a boundless Continent
> Dark, waste, and wild, under the frown of Night
> Starless expos'd, and ever-threatning storms
> Of *Chaos* blustring round, inclement skie.
>
> (PL 3.422–26)

The instant shift from "seem'd" to "seems," and the implied change in size (like the sudden change of devils from giants to pygmies at the end of Book 1) from "Globe" to "boundless Continent" is not accompanied by a move to a safer world. "Chaos blustring round" still threatens.

Like the world currently being explored by Renaissance adventurers, merchants, cartographers, and colonizers, Chaos comes into the poem with no maps: it is terra incognita, and as we voyage through it we lose our bearings. Even when he travels through the created universe, "the calm Firmament," having left Chaos behind, as Satan bends his course we all get lost: "but up or downe / By center or eccentric, hard to tell, / Or Longitude" (3.574–6)—and it is worth remembering that the puzzle of determining longitude, as Milton well knew, had not yet been solved. As Stevie Davies says about this passage, "to alternate *up* and *down*, the central dynamic of *Paradise Lost*, is to collapse the meaningfulness of the distinction. The scrupulous narrator cannot say whether Satan followed the sun's own trajectory or cut across it because he cannot claim to know whether the Ptolemaic or the Copernican model of the universe is authentic."[21] Cosmography is a matter still to be determined, and Milton is not merely scrupulous about this but, as Davies rightly acknowledges, he actively exploits this uncertainty to involve the reader in the Satanic adventure. If we project our imaginations back to the world of early global navigation by those precious and immensely valuable logbooks, we see that, much as we may desire a bird's-eye view of the universe, the world is not nearly so well known. In *Paradise Lost*, "Mountains of ice . . . stop th' imagin'd way / Beyond the *Petsora* Eastward, to the rich / *Cathaian* Coast" (10.291–93), and we need to recall the force of that "imagined" for a contemporary reader: a North-East passage to Cathay was still regarded as a possibility. Henry Hudson had looked for it in 1607 and 1608, and the report that it was only icebergs that barred his way still evoked excited responses fifty years later. Satan's voyage of discovery is much closer to what his contemporaries would experience than anything the modern traveller, safe with a blanket over his legs, can normally know.

[21] Davies, *Milton*, p. 123.

2. *Approaching Paradise*

Even more than his hypocritical address to Uriel in Book 3, Satan's honest address to the Sun in Book 4 ("how I hate thy beams") reflects in the form of parody the blind Miltonic narrator's address to "holy Light" at the opening of Book 3. The reflection makes one of many ironic pairs out of which *Paradise Lost* is constructed. The speech, which is delivered from the top of Mount Niphates in the belief that he is unobserved, ends with Satan's renewed determination to seek "Divided Empire" with God by colonizing Earth. The threat to man is serious, the more so now that we have experienced the depths of Satan's despair and seen the unlikelihood of his repenting his announced course. The narrative at this point, though, plays several more tricks on the reader's perception. Is the effect to underline the threat to all of us, or our general closeness to Satan? Let us see how it works.

During his speech, we learn, Satan's face has been so disfigured by emotion, and his body so twisted by "gestures fierce" (4.128) that Uriel, the angel whom he had deceived in heaven to get information about Earth and directions, now realizes he must be a false dissembler. We already learned, discouragingly, that only God can tell a hypocrite from the real thing (3.682–85). Now the effect of Uriel's renewed perception is immediately to separate us from Satan and get us back outside to an observer position. The effect is disorienting, since on the one hand we are deliberately offered another point of view than Satan's—the spy is spied on "As he suppos'd, all unobserv'd, unseen" (4.131)—and yet that point of view just gets absorbed by the narrative until we are not sure who sees what. Uriel sees Satan, but quickly "he's" and "him" succeed each other confusingly. It's not that we can't pause and figure out which "he" is which, but that we are made to pause and do so, to sort the fallen from heavenly angel in our minds. Even before we find Uriel in the text, Satan doubles his own point of view and indeed becomes self-conscious, aware, not that he is watched, but that his countenance might betray him: "Whereof hee soon aware, / Each perturbation smooth'd with outward calme" (4.119–20). The effect is that when Uriel reappears from Book 3 he simply steps into the viewing position already occupied by Satan. Further, he is in an oblique grammatical case, not the subject of the sentence:

> Yet not anough had practisd to deceive
> *Uriel* once warnd; whose eye pursu'd him down
> The way he went, and on th' *Assyrian* mount
> Saw him disfigur'd, more then could befall
> Spirit of happie sort: his gestures fierce
> He markd and mad demeanour, then alone,
> As he suppos'd, all unobserv'd, unseen.

So on he fares, and to the border comes,
Of *Eden*

(PL 4.124–32)

"So on he fares" and we must pause, however briefly, to get straight that this is not Uriel, whom we expect to take instant action, but Satan, the last "he" mentioned, though only by a line from the "he" that is Uriel.

We later learn that Uriel must instantly have done the same thing as Satan here, hied him off to Eden. But Uriel at this point in the narration does nothing—it is not until line 555 that he arrives at the part of Paradise where Gabriel and the other guardian angels are supposedly on watch. Comically, even foolishly, certainly irresponsibly, we might say these guardians of Adam and Eve in Paradise are just killing time: Gabriel is sitting down awaiting night, while the other angels, like their counterparts in Hell, are exercising "Heroic Games" (552). At the point of Satan's approach to Paradise, however, we know nothing about these watchers, and indeed Uriel simply disappears for the intervening 420 lines.

So it is Satan, we quickly ascertain, who fares onward and comes to "the border of Eden." Now what happens? Well, we retain Satan's point of view, since the narrative says "where delicious Paradise, / Now nearer, Crowns with her enclosure green, /As with a rural mound the champain head/ Of a steep wilderness." That "Now nearer" clearly situates us with Satan, and what we see is what he sees. Even the present tense of the verbs puts us there, since from the narrator's point of view, as he frequently reminds us, Paradise is a long way in the past. But what then are we to make of the lines that mention the wall of Paradise? No further point of view has intervened, nor has Adam himself even been introduced, except as he whose abode is Paradise in Uriel's recounting of the Creation to Satan (3.735). Yet this is what the narrative produces, following the description of the lofty trees of Eden:

Yet higher then thir tops
The verdurous wall of paradise up sprung:
Which to our general Sire gave prospect large
Into his neather Empire neighbouring round.

(PL 4.142–45)

I challenge any reader of those lines not to hesitate a moment, perhaps even to make Satan our general Sire and this world we are visiting with him "his neather Empire"—as indeed he wants it to be, as indeed it will become.

As the description continues the point of view gets even more confused. Obviously we keep going higher up, from the tall trees of Eden up to the wall of Paradise itself, the verdurous hedge that serves our "general Sire" for a lookout, and thence to the even taller trees within "loaden with fairest Fruit, /

Blossoms and Fruits at once of golden hue" (4.147–48). But now comes another observer of all this, highest of all, the Sun, who clearly likes the sight and

> more glad impress'd his beams
> Then in fair Evening Cloud, or humid Bow,
> When God hath showrd the earth; so lovely seemd
> That Lantskip: And of pure now purer aire
> Meets his approach, and to the heart inspires
> Vernal delight and joy.
>
> (PL 4.150–55)

The Sun's approach? Well, no, it must be Satan's, in spite of the violation of the rule of pronoun reference, and the disconcerting repetition of the Sun's emotional response to Eden in Satan's ("more glad"—"delight and joy"), just as if he were a creature of this place himself.

But wait, are we not misreading again? Is it Satan's heart that is inspired with delight and joy? Is that possible? Well, several other passages confirm he is indeed capable of such emotional and aesthetic reponse; for example, a few lines later when he looks down from the Tree of Life and (the text mingles Satanic and human response)

> Beneath him with new wonder now he views
> To all delight of human sense expos'd
> In narrow room Natures whole wealth, yea more,
> A Heav'n on Earth.
>
> (PL 4.205–8)

And several commentators do read the lines of Satan's approach to Paradise as expressing his own mind. For they continue as follows:

> And of pure now purer aire
> Meets his approach, and to the heart inspires
> Vernal delight and joy, able to drive
> All sadness but despair: now gentle gales
> Fanning thir odoriferous wings dispense
> Native perfumes, and whisper whence they stole
> Those balmie spoiles.
>
> (PL 4.153–59)

Arnold Stein, a very fine reader, insists that "no matter how luxuriously, and innocently, the description seems to wander, it never ceases to explore the drama of Satan's consciousness." The breezes (i.e., "gales," a more moderate word in Milton's day than our own), for example, reflect Satan's mind, since they "whisper whence they stole / Those balmie spoiles" (4.158–59). They thus "betray Satan's intended crime as the 'first grand Thief' [4.192], and

anticipate Satan's own language when he says that man has been endowed 'With Heav'nly spoils, our spoils' [9.151]."[22]

Still, the text says not "his heart" but "the heart," anyone's, including mine. The text invites us to include Satan's point of view in our own, and to continue to do so as it expands with that one devastatingly brief comment that this air is able "to drive / All sadness but despair." The word "despair" prepares for the geographical location that introduces the subsequent simile, one derived from the contemporary seventeenth-century world of exploration and commerce with the East, along the spice route.

> As when to them who saile
> Beyond the *Cape of Hope*, and now are past
> *Mozambic*, off at Sea North-East windes blow
> *Sabean* Odours from the spicie shoare
> Of *Arabie* the blest, with such delay
> Well pleas'd they slack thir course, and many a League
> Chear'd with the grateful smell old Ocean smiles.
> So entertaind those odorous sweets the Fiend
> Who came thir bane, though with them better pleas'd
> Then *Asmodeus* with the fishie fume,
> That drove him, though enamourd, from the Spouse
> Of *Tobits* Son, and with a vengeance sent
> From *Media* post to *Ægypt*, there fast bound.
>
> (PL 4.159–171)

Paul Alpers comments on these lines as follows:

> The simile does not, as in Stein's account, simply comment on Satan's passing the Cape of [Good] Hope and slackening his course. It continues the work of the opening lines by making us apprehend, in the most powerful and intimate ways, our relation to Satan. We are indeed in the same boat with him—a fact we feel the more strongly since several earlier passages have compared Satan to heroic and enterprising voyagers (II 636, 1017, 1043). The question is whether we are "beyond the Cape of Hope" in the sense that Satan is, whether "Arabie the blest" is as ironic for us as for him. . . . The fullness of the verse makes us, like the sailors in the simile, "with such delay/ Well pleas'd." We experience a moment of liberation from the need to arrive anywhere or to do anything to exploit the place we have reached.[23]

So far so good; excellent analysis. Alpers imagines, however, that the simile differentiates between sailors and Satan, or rather between "ourselves and Sa-

[22] Arnold Stein, *Answerable Style* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1953), pp. 58–59.
[23] Paul Alpers, "The Milton Controversy," *Harvard English Studies* 2 (1971): pp. 295–96.

tan" (he rather loses sight of the sailors and assumes they are the generalized readers subsumed under that imperious critical "we"), since "as we smell the spicy breezes we slack our course in a way that Satan cannot." On the contrary, I should have thought that the repeated participial form of the verb—"well pleas'd" for the sailors, "better pleas'd" for Satan—re-establishes in the concluding tag the main *tertium comparationis*, our joint pleasure in the wafted smell.

But now comes that further comparison clearly differentiating between Satan's pleased reaction to the air and the evil Asmodeus's to the "fishie fume" (4.168) that drove him, though enamored, away from the woman he had been possessing. Again this is one of those curious effects of reversal with which the poem is redolent, "bringing a sudden stink of fish across the sweet smell of flowers."[24] The contrast also shows that no such stench (of the kind with which, in many folkloric or psychoanalytic contexts, Satan himself is often associated, subsumed under the generic "sulphurous") comes to protect this vulnerable Paradise from the predator who now invades. The subject of Tobias and the angel Raphael was common among seventeenth-century artists, including the splendid Rembrandt now in the Louvre. The story contrasts with Satan's arrival at Paradise in various other ways: Tobias, unlike Adam, was able to use the angel Raphael's advice to overcome the evil spirit Asmodeus (he was driven away from Sarah by the stink of burning fish-liver), and Tobias's success was, typologically speaking, a "vengeance" (4.170) for Adam's failure. Sarah had previously been given to seven men, but the jealous spirit had killed each before the marriage was consummated. But on the angel's advice, Tobias burned a fish, and the smell drove the spirit off "into the utmost parts of Egypt, where the angel bound him," as the Book of Tobit relates (8.3). This was an apocryphal book, but printed in many contemporary Bibles, including the Geneva Bible often used by Milton. Readers would be expected to pick up most of these parallels. Asmodeus was a deity of Persian origin (*Aesma Deva*). Milton and his readers would not know this, to be sure, but they would recognize that, like those Watcher angels, the Sons of God of Genesis 6.1–4 so prominent in the *Book of Enoch* tradition, he was an angel who lusted after a woman. Satan is being drawn into that alignment also.

Adam will have no such crude fishy magic at his disposal when the critical moment comes. Yet apart from the smell, which is the obvious point of Milton's contrast here, there are subterranean similarities between the two myths. The parallel is drawn explicitly at 5.221–23 when Raphael is first summoned for his mission, and Asmodeus (in the variant *Asmadai*) recurs at 6.365 and in *Paradise Regain'd* 2.152. Tobias is to use the gall of that same fish to cure his father Tobit's blindness, one reason why the story appealed to Milton. The presence of this story is also one of several hints that the relations among angel, man, and woman are to be at least partly sexual and that the outcome will

[24] C. S. Lewis, *Preface*, p. 42.

turn on sexual insecurity, though not of the obvious kind signalled by the Asmodeus story. In at least one of the participants it will involve explicit sexual jealousy.

3. *Satan's Entry into Paradise*

This complicated text, with its varying emotions that brings Satan and the reader towards Paradise is thus full of difficult shifts in point of view and representation, leaving us uncertain where we are or how we are to evaluate what we see and smell and hear. But then suddenly comes an extended passage that leaves us in no doubt at all how we are to read it. Satan looks for a way into Paradise, but when he sees the one entrance placed on the East of Eden, disdains it and "at one slight bound high over leap'd all bound / Of Hill or highest Wall" (4.181–82). This weak pun leads Milton to compare Satan to a wolf, and then to a thief, both terms echoing John 10.12. In comparing hireling priests to thieves and wolves, Milton is alluding to his own poem "Lycidas," as well as to the pamphlet he had written just before the Restoration, *Considerations Touching the Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings out of the Church*. He is also bringing up one of the causes of the recent Civil War. The conclusion is inescapable: moral and psychological doubts we may well have about our closeness to Satan, but the political question of how the Church should be governed (by men with a vocation, not through the practice of "livings" or of paid clergy) admits of no doubt at all, and in this context Satan suddenly loses all his characteristic ambivalence.

Similarly when Satan now flies up from the ground where he has landed to perch unknowingly on the Tree of Life, neither the comparison to a cormorant nor the moral that follows about God being the only one who knows how "to value right" the good before him suggests any ambivalence at all. Fowler ad loc points out that Milton must have heard the cry of the cormorant often "for just across the road from his house in Petty France the king's cormorants were kept in St. James's Park." Fowler also shows that the greedy rapaciousness of the bird was often used to represent hireling clergy. So both Milton's main targets in his political polemic, the monarchy and the misgovernment of the Church, are present in the cormorant simile. Not much room for doubt, then, about the moral implications of the perspective from which we are about to see the Garden of Eden, blissful Paradise of God. It is Satan's perspective, and Satan, we have just been forcefully reminded, is up to no good. The narrator has momentarily regained his suspicious, adversarial view of Satan.

4. *Paradise*

Paradise, however, will prove a tricky place in which to distinguish the two points of view. For one thing the very inclusiveness of the idea of Paradise

makes it a complex, multiform place. All classical ideas of a Golden Age are made relevant ("fruit burnisht with Golden Rinde / Hung amiable, *Hesperian* Fables true, / If true, here only, and of delicious taste"; 4.249–51), as well as various Christian traditions about Paradise.[25] Milton even wants the elegance of contemporary seventeenth-century living to be a part of how we imagine this world: God is a "sovran Planter" (4.691) and the whole is described as a country house setting, "a happy rural seat of various view" (4.247), and we are invited to smell "*Sabean* Odours from the spicie shoare / Of *Arabie* the blest" (4.162–63), along the route of the spice trade in Milton's era. One result of this all-inclusiveness is that, very oddly for a supposedly Christian place, we find that the supposedly pagan "Universal *Pan* / Knit with the *Graces* and the *Hours* in dance / Led on th' Eternal Spring" (4.266–68).

For another thing, the very moralizing sentence that precedes the description tells us we are likely to be as blind to it as Satan: "So little knows / Any, but God alone, to value right / The good before him, but perverts best things / To worst abuse, or to thir meanest use" (4.201–4). It sounds like Satan, surely, but the subject of that sentence is actually anyone but God—that is, all of us! After that it may not help much that the narrative tries valiantly to detach itself from the wondering Satan by inserting an adjectival "human":

> Beneath him with new wonder now he views
> To all delight of human sense expos'd
> In narrow room Nature's whole wealth, yea more,
> A Heav'n on Earth, for blissful Paradise
> Of God the Garden was, by him in the East
> Of *Eden* planted.
>
> (PL 4.205–10)

And from now on, the description of the Garden tries hard to be merely human, not satanic. Anne Ferry insisted that

> the assertion often repeated by critics that we see Eden through Satan's eyes illustrates again the dangers of ignoring Milton's special narrator. These critics have, I believe, recognized in the tone that the observer of Eden is fallen, but have identified that tone with the character rather than with the speaker, whose presence they tend to discount or forget. We are told what sights confront Satan, but those sights are described for us in the language of the narrator, not the language of the fallen Archangel.[26]

[25] For these traditions, see A. Bartlett Giamatti, *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), Harry Levin, *The Myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), and Evans, Paradise Lost *and the Genesis Tradition*.

[26] Anne Ferry, *Epic Voice*, pp. 51–52.

But surely in this passage the word "human" seems at first to endorse, not to contradict, the Satanic viewpoint. After all, we have not yet had any humans to have a "sense." That supposedly independent language keeps getting tripped by its involvement with Satan. Indeed the example of the difference Ferry goes on to use is the very one with which I just illustrated the confusion; to wit, those lines about the prospect of our general (Satanic?) sire (4.144–45).

But it is not simply the range of symbolic significance or the attempt at doubling the point of view that complicates this Paradise; it is the syntax and rhythm of the descriptions. One passage in particular resumes the whole: the famous negative description of Paradise, which apparently distinguishes it from all other such places but in fact invites the fallen reader to view it through these successive lenses: "Not that faire field / Of *Enna*, where *Proserpin* gathering flours / Her self a fairer Floure by gloomy *Dis* / Was gatherd" (4.268–71), nor any other such classical *locus amoenus*—none of these places is anything like this Assyrian garden. This is line 285, so the sentence has now extended itself for 17 luxurious lines, at which point comes the sudden reminder that we watch it all, though we have certainly forgotten, from a particular point of view: "where the Fiend / Saw undelighted all delight." The shock of the word "Fiend" falling at the line-end is very powerful. The shock is increased by the pun on the word "delight," and the combination recurs here to frame the passage, as in the oral epic technique of ring composition, from the line (206) in which the whole description of Paradise began. Etymologically "Eden" means "delight"—and Milton's fondness for puns here brings the meaning almost brutally to our attention so we can follow out the implications of a spectator who is present but excluded from the spectacle.

And an enticingly strange spectacle it is. Perhaps the main peculiarity of Milton's Puritan-Protestant version of Paradise is the presence of the work ethic. This place is not static or complete (the root meaning of "perfect"), but contains the possibility of growth, change, development, learning—and error. It exists in time, and the garden needs to be tended or it will grow wild; even though "without Thorn the Rose" (4.256), this is

> A Wilderness of Sweets; for Nature here
> Wantond as in her prime, and plaid at will
> Her Virgin Fancies, pouring forth more sweet,
> Wilde above Rule or Art; enormous bliss.
>
> (PL 5.294–297)

The paradox in these lines (and in the "wanton growth" of Eden at 4.629) is central to understanding Milton. As Roy Flannagan says in his commentary,

> Nature can wanton while still having "Virgin Fancies" without becoming guilty or promiscuous, and the adjective form seems again to be innocent

> in Eve's "wanton ringlets" (4.306). Wantoning here seems to lead to fecundity, which also is innocent. There seems to be a connection between Nature pouring forth sweets and the "mounted sun" shooting "fervid Raies to warme / Earths inmost womb" [in the next lines, 5.300–302]. Nature before the fall is innocently but perpetually sexual and fecund. (RM n. 90, p. 484)

And the reader has to adjust his own immediate reactions to this innocent use of words like "wanton," especially since we have already heard about the "wanton passions" of "*Sions* daughters" amid the "dark Idolatries / Of alienated *Judah*" at 1.453–57. The same is true elsewhere of the four streams of Paradise that run "wandring many a famous Realme" (4.234), and the brooks that water the flowers with nectar and roll with "mazie error under pendant shades" (4.239). "Error" has its Latin meaning, from errare, of "wandering" (which inevitably recalls the philosophical devils of 2.561 "in wandring mazes lost," as well as anticipating the fear expressed by the narrator in the invocation to Book 7.19–20 that like Bellerophon, he may "fall / Erroneous there to wander and forlorne").[27]

In the same way, and perhaps with the same required shift of moral vision, some phrases are appropriate to this special world but nonetheless strike a reader as very odd: "vegetable Gold" (4.220) of the fruit on the Tree of Life is one example that has been much argued back and forth.[28] Fowler hears an echo of "potable Gold" from 3.608 and "vegetable stone," both forms of the elixir of life or Philospher's Stone. Leonard adds a probable reference to Vergil's Golden Bough in *Aeneid* 6.143–44. Gold has in fact been something the poem thinks about from time to time ever since Mammon failed to notice the difference between Heaven's Gold and Hell's (1.679–83, 2.271–73)—and he's right, of course: it isn't gold that makes the difference. Here, too, the gold of Paradise links also to the subsidiary meaning of money and so invokes, though

[27] Some of the best pages of criticism in Fish, *Surprised by Sin*, pp. 93–107, especially the critical discussions collected on p. 93, start from these passages; see also ibid., p. 141, and Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style*, pp. 110–112, Evans, *Genesis Tradition*, pp. 247–52, and chap. 9 below, for Satan's many curling and wanton wreaths (9.517–18).

[28] F. R. Leavis, *Revaluation*, p. 50, wrote that "it would be no use to try and argue with any one who contended that 'vegetable Gold' exemplified the same kind of fusion as 'green shops' [*Comus* 716]." The reference is to the approval given by T. S. Eliot and his followers to the "fusion" of unlike ingredients in Metaphysical images. Douglas Bush replied: "While [the critic] seems to think the Tree of Life should have been presented in terms acceptable to the horticulturalist, Milton wishes, with an oblique glance at the apples of the Hesperides, to suggest a mysterious growth hardly to be approached in words. In the paradoxical phrase 'vegetable Gold,' which Mr. Leavis especially scorns, each word is altered and quickened by the other; the richness of 'Gold' glorifies the simple product of nature, and the rich natural life implied in 'vegetable' gives pliant form and vitality to metallic hardness and removes the idea of unhealthy artifice and evil which in *Paradise Lost* is associated with gold," *"Paradise Lost" in Our Time* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1945), p. 96.

in a subdued way, contemporary economics. When Satan first approaches Paradise he sees "In narrow room Natures whole wealth" (4.207). The buried idea is that nature's wealth is different from the world's, especially if we recognize the play with Marlowe's great line from *The Jew of Malta*: "infinite riches in a little room" (Prologue 71). In Marlowe the line marvellously expresses the tight financial world of Elizabethan London and its capitalist energies: in Milton the allusion enhances the difference between modern riches and Nature's wealth. And Satan, whose point of view this is, seems to recall the line a little later when he articulates his designs on the first couple:

> Hell shall unfold,
> To entertain you two, her widest Gates,
> And send forth all her Kings; there will be room,
> Not like these narrow limits, to receive
> Your numerous ofspring.
>
> (PL 4.381–85)

When the language of Satan's discourse echoes the narrator's so obviously, it is no wonder that Milton's poetic technique has often been compared to what he wrote earlier in *Areopagitica* about the mixture of good and evil.

> Good and evill we know in the field of this world grow up together almost inseparably; and the knowledge of good is so involved and interwoven with the knowledge of evill, and in so many cunning resemblances hardly to be discern'd, that those confused seeds which were imposed on *Psyche* as an incessant labour to cull out and sort asunder, were not more intermixt. It was from out the rind of one apple tasted, that the knowledge of good and evill, as two twins cleaving together, leaped forth into the world. And perhaps this is that doom that *Adam* fell into of knowing good and evill, that is to say, of knowing good by evill.
>
> . . . Since therefore the knowledge and survey of vice is in this world so necessary to the constituting of human vertue, and the scanning of error to the confirmation of truth how can we more safely and with lesse danger scout into the regions of sin and falsity than by reading all manner of tractats and hearing all manner of reason? And this is the benefit which may be had of books promiscuously read.[29]

Evidently Milton conceived *Paradise Lost* so that it would offer his reader just such an experience as he here recommends. "For God sure esteems the growth and compleating of one vertuous person, more than the restraint of ten vitious" (297). Adam's labor then, like Psyche's or the reader's, is not necessarily doomed.

[29] *Areopagitica*, p. 13, in PM, p. 287.

5. *Sex*

The long sentence cited above, the one in which we are recalled to the Satanic point of view on Eden by the pun on the word "delight," does not in fact end there. Indeed it now introduces, in its eighteenth line, the main characters in the poem: the inhabitants of Eden are there initially in grammatical apposition to the word "delight." "all delight, all kind / Of living Creatures new to sight and strange:"—and the colon now leads in "Two of far nobler shape erect and tall, / Godlike erect, with native Honour clad / In naked Majestie seemd Lords of all" (4.286–90). The reader's first sight of Adam and Eve thus coincides with Satan's, and what he sees is what "seemd." The word "seemd" in fact occurs three times in the first eight lines of the description, each time as a main verb.[30] This must raise a question in any alert reader, whether what we see can be seen without distortion, and this question becomes especially important when Eve is described, she of the swelling breast, who wears her hair as a veil down to her waist "Dissheveld, but in wanton ringlets wav'd" (4.306).

The most notorious lines in the description are those that insist on Eve's apparent inferiority:

> though both
> Not equal, as thir sex not equal seemd;
> For contemplation hee and valour formd,
> For softness shee and sweet attractive Grace,
> Hee for God only, shee for God in him.
>
> (PL 4.295–99)

Here the narrator points to, indeed insists on, what is going to be the central problem of the poem, and what is going to make all the difference. Human sexuality is the focus of the action, both the great source of happiness it can/could be, and what it has become. Love between a man and a woman is the great central issue of life, and Milton as usual faces its implications head-on. Eve is created not only different but "not equal," which seems to mean inferior, or so most Christian theology implies: that will be the source of her dissatisfaction, what Satan will exploit. Indeed the poem generally assumes that "not equal" means they have different positions in a hierarchy. It certainly does for Satan, and in the dream sequence as well as the temptation itself, he gets Eve to believe it, too.

So the difference between Adam and Eve, on which so much—indeed everything—turns, is not just along a horizontal scale of difference, with Eve toward the graceful and softer end, Adam toward the valorous and contemplative. It also seems to be a vertical scale, with Adam superior. But is the hier-

[30] James Grantham Turner, *One Flesh*, p. 266.

archical difference really there, or is it an instance of Satanic perception?[31] Satan's view of Paradise is, after all, the one we are offered, and although the narrator may have a view independent from Satan's, his use of the word "seemd" denies that independent view to the reader. The narrator has taken us into the consciousness of Satan, and here offers us no unequivocal sign that we have come out again. In fact it is not until line 312, with the insistence on the pastness of all this in the repeated "then"s, that we find again the unmistakable voice of the narrator in his and our present time.

Indeed, the "image of thir glorious Maker" is something Satan knows only too well, and he recognizes it immediately. He responds soon in soliloquy to his/our first sight of Adam and Eve, and with no hidden smirk or hypocrisy. He is simply reacting to the narrator's language for his own vision:

> O Hell! what does mine eyes with grief behold,
> Into our room of bliss thus high advanc't
> Creatures of other mould, earth-born perhaps,
> Not Spirits, yet to heav'nly Spirits bright
> Little inferior; whom my thoughts pursue
> With wonder, and could love, so lively shines
> In them Divine resemblance, and such grace
> The hand that formd them on thir shape hath pourd.
> (PL 4.358–65)

The exclamation is entirely and characteristically modern: "O Hell!"—a casual curse—yet this is Satan himself swearing by Hell, addressing it even, and so addressing himself. And he sees these creatures as intruders in his own territory ("our room of bliss"). But what is most surprising is that he says he

[31] J. Hillis Miller, like many readers, thinks "Eve's disheveled wantonness means that she is in effect already fallen," or at least that her wild hair implies independence as well as subjection, which is as good as being fallen. Miller is demonstrating the method of deconstruction, since he thinks Milton's "apparent intention" is to show the opposite: language and intention here work against each other ("How Deconstruction Works," *New York Times Magazine*, 9 Feb. 1986: 25). Joseph Wittreich, *Feminist Milton* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 85–91, on the other hand, thinks that "seeing here as Satan sees, installing himself within the Satanic perspective, the narrator decribes Eve's 'dissheveld' tresses and 'wanton ringlets' only to find in them evidence of Eve's 'subjection' (IV 305–8)." But against Wittreich's argument for original equality, see Raphael at 8.561–95, and God (the Son) at 10.145–56. The best commentary on these crucial lines is probably Diane McColley, *Milton's Eve* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983), pp. 22–42, although she does not quite see how Milton encourages Eve to fall (i.e., to listen seriously to Satan's flattery) by stating the problem of her subordination so clearly. From Eve's point of view at least the problem was there from the beginning, even though she only begins to notice it in her dream: therefore the problem is with the Creation; that is, once again with Milton's difficult God.

could love the human pair.[32] And why? Because of their likeness to God, he whom we thought we knew he hated. Not only in the subjectivity, but even in the surprises, the twists of consciousness, Satan is like us. Milton blends his perception with the narration till it is hard to tell one from the other.

When Milton first envisaged the theme of his poem he was going to write it not as an epic poem but as a tragedy, "Adam unparadiz'd." In the second outline for the play preserved in the Trinity manuscript, Moses was to explain to the earthly audience that "they cannot se Adam in the state of innocence by reason of thire sin"; in the third outline, similarly, the chorus in the second act is to sing the wedding of Adam and Eve as "the mariage song and to describe Paradice," while in the next version Adam and Eve appear on stage only once they are fallen: "man next & Eve having by this time bin seduc't by the serpent appeares confusedly cover'd with leaves."[33] In the epic, however, where the specific difference from drama is the presence of a narrator (adumbrated already in the function of the chorus), the full possibilities of the life of Adam and Eve in Eden can be recounted, though with constant reminders of the sin—and Satan—with which our imaginations are necessarily entangled.

The implication of narrators in their tales becomes especially obvious since Milton sides with a minority tradition and has the first man and woman be not only naked, as the opening lines of the description stress so egregiously, but sexually mature from the first,[34] and making love. It is this that makes Satan so jealous.

> Sight hateful, sight tormenting! thus these two
> Imparadis't in one anothers arms
> The happier *Eden*, shall enjoy thir fill
> Of bliss on bliss, while I to Hell am thrust,
> Where neither joy nor love, but fierce desire
> Among our other torments not the least,
> Still unfulfill'd with pain of longing pines.
>
> (PL 4.505–11)

What Satan sees immediately is that Paradise, like Hell, is both a place and a state of mind or being: what makes it Paradise is love. Adam and Eve are "Imparadis't" in being with each other, physically. To this lonely voyeur, ex-

[32] Is there perhaps an echo of Miranda's response to Ferdinand in *The Tempest*? If so, the overlapping of the innocent virgin and Satan sets up interesting resonances.

[33] See Flannagan's discussion (RM pp. 310–11).

[34] Turner, *One Flesh*, p. 236, well contrasts Hugo Grotius and his fellow Dutchman Jacob Cats, who has the animals come to congratulate Adam on deflowering Eve; cf. his fine contrast with the erotic and "evocative portraiture" of Eve in Beaumont's *Psyche*, pp. 253–55: "he seems to enjoy the tactic of arousing sexual expectations only to deflect them; we do not learn until later that Adam and Eve were virgins throughout the period of innocence."

cluded from Paradise ("while I to Hell am thrust"—note the present tense), a man and a woman in each other's arms is "the happier *Eden*."[35] Satan's own feelings, he knows, contrast miserably: "fierce desire / Among our other torments not the least." And why? Because "Still unfulfill'd." Note how he is coolly able to generalize philosophically about the scale of pain ("our . . . torments," "not the least") even in this moment of intense jealousy. And Satan adds a phrase that may seem simply to repeat what he has said in other words (*variatio*): "with pain of longing pines." But the phrase in fact contains two further figures of interest: a pun on "pain" and "pine," which in Milton's southern, London dialect may have been pronounced almost the same,[36] as they would be in current Cockney; and "pain of longing" is another way of saying not just desire but "nostalgia"—so important to Satan's experience here, and also to ours: we, too, are both present to, and excluded from, this *Paradise Lost*.

Sometimes this is more obvious than at others. The initial description of Adam and Eve together gets rather more sensual in the latter part as it finds language for Eve—and then immediately adds the external excluded point of view, narrator's and reader's, that we just saw was Satan's.

> His fair large Front and Eye sublime declar'd
> Absolute rule; and Hyacinthin Locks
> Round from his parted forelock manly hung
> Clustring, but not beneath his shoulders broad:
> Shee as a vail down to the slender waste
> Her unadorned golden tresses wore
> Dissheveld, but in wanton ringlets wav'd
> As the Vine curles her tendrils, which impli'd
> Subjection, but requir'd with gentle sway,
> And by her yielded, by him best receivd,
> Yielded with coy submission, modest pride,
> And sweet reluctant amorous delay.
> Nor those mysterious parts were then conceald,
> Then was not guiltie shame, dishonest shame
> Of natures works, honor dishonorable,
> Sin-bred, how have ye troubl'd all mankind
> With shews instead, meer shews of seeming pure,

[35] C. S. Lewis memorably described this Satan as degraded to "a mere Peeping Tom leering and writhing in prurience as he overlooks the privacy of two lovers, . . . a thing that peers in at bedroom or bathroom windows," *Preface*, p. 97; Kenneth Gross suggests that it is Lewis's eye, not Satan's that has here converted the sacred bower into "a bourgeois bedroom or bathroom" ("Satan and the Romantic Satan: a Notebook," in *Re-membering Milton*, ed. Mary Nyquist and Margaret W. Ferguson [London: Methuen, 1988], p. 324). But all readers are invited to this spectacle.

[36] Cf. 2.544, "Through pain up by the roots *Thessalian* Pines."

> And banisht from mans life his happiest life,
> Simplicitie and spotless innocence.
>
> (PL 4.300–318)

This extraordinary passage contains at least two shocks. First, though the sense is complete at the end of line 305 ("tresses wore"), the poem extends itself with a line that becomes quite frankly sensual about Eve's "dissheveld" hair and its "wanton ringlets, and her "coy submission." The *OED* cites this passage to illustrate the meaning of "coy" as shyly reserved, but elsewhere Milton used the word in its familiar modern context, "coy flurting stile."[37] This is an excellent example of the way that in reading Milton one needs to be aware both of older and more recent meanings of words, since otherwise the ambivalence of these lines is lost. And "wanton"? (Like Nature in her prime, as we saw above). Can we possibly read that word and not relate it to fallen sexuality? It is a struggle, at the very least, to recover innocent meanings for words like "wanton" and "coy," or to fully grasp the paradox implied in the oxymoron of "modest pride."

And then, as if the narrative knows we are unlikely to be equal to the struggle, it almost turns on itself to insist that, whatever our reaction may have been to those words and this nakedness, "Then was not guiltie shame." The lines repeat the familiar doctrine from Genesis 3 that shame came into the world with the Fall ("Sin-bred"), but also seem to imply that it is the very feeling of shame itself that prevents us from enjoying the innocence of nakedness. There was indeed one Puritan sect at the time, the Adamites, who, like Blake, practised nudity in search of just such Edenic innocence.[38] At any rate words like "wanton," which is used both for Eve and for Paradise, as we saw, show how clearly the world of the Garden is bodied forth in its inhabitants.

Critics divide, understandably given the intimate sensitivity of the issues raised, on whether these passages allow the reader access to what Milton "considered a relaxed and natural form of sexual delight," or whether the intrinsic fallenness of rhetoric is an impenetrable barrier.[39] The reader's experience could not participate in such innocence or there would be no need for the

[37] *Apology against a Pamphlet* (YP 1.873), cited in Flannagan (RM, n. 92, p. 451).

[38] See Flannagan's note (RM, n. 95, p. 452). But David Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), suggests in his last chapter that the 1641 descriptions of their clandestine rites were probably designed to discredit other religious separatists by association, and therefore they may not have existed.

[39] Turner, *One Flesh*, p. 257. Lawrence Lerner suggested in *Love and Marriage* (London: Arnold, 1979) that "there is no denying that the unfallen love of Adam and Eve must seem cold to us" (p. 117, cited in Turner, p. 264). That is partly because, paradoxically, the contrast of innocent and fallen sexuality is not maintained. Professor Lerner is not perhaps immune to Eve's blush, but thinks it should not be there: "The very fact that Milton can see the blush as part of Eve's charm is testimony to his own fallen state, but undermines the necessary contrast" (p. 118). I suppose all of this discussion reveals more about ourselves than it does about Milton. But that's what we like about literature.

stern and bitter words about shame; or is it perhaps that these words rather exorcise the shame? Certainly the Satanic point of view is the way we see the naked couple first, and this fallen perspective will not let us see clearly and simply. But that does not necessarily mean it will not let us see at all. Perhaps the shame is given to the narrator that it may be excluded from the Garden.

The effect may be gauged by comparison with the Dryden adaptation, since he makes the opposite decision, giving the shame to Adam and Eve. As Turner puts it, they "describe their own erotic life in terms that come ludicrously close to the jaded and stylized routines of Restoration comedy."[40] Eve says:

> Somewhat forbids me, which I cannot name,
> For ignorant of guilt, I fear not shame:
> But some restraining thought, I know not why,
> Tells me, you long should beg, I long deny.
> (*State of Innocence*, p II.ii.52–55 436)

We may be grateful, if the result would have turned out anything like this, that Milton's earlier plans for a drama were abandoned.

This pattern of presentation and response is repeated later, that evening in fact, when Adam takes Eve to the bower and we are reminded they had no need to undress: we are told that they "Strait side by side were laid" (4.741), neither turning away nor refusing the other—phrases that show the mutuality of this sexual encounter and rather undermine the suggestion we heard earlier about Eve's "sweet reluctant amorous delay." It sounds as if Adam does have, in the helpmeet he asked God for, an equal.[41] But instead of continuing the description the narrator goes negative on us, and directs us away to ourselves and our own impoverished and deprived sexuality:

> nor turnd I weene
> *Adam* from his fair Spouse, nor *Eve* the Rites
> Mysterious of connubial Love refus'd:
> Whatever Hypocrites austerely talk
> Of puritie and place and innocence,
> Defaming as impure what God declares
> Pure, and commands to som, leaves free to all.
> Our Maker bids increase, who bids abstain
> But our destroyer, foe to God and Man?
> (PL 4.741–49)

So Satan, foe to God and man, is explicitly identified with that "hypocrite lecteur" the text is trying a little too hard to exorcise.

[40] Turner, *One Flesh*, p. 264.

[41] PL 8.383, 407: though the word exists only by implication from its opposite or absence in those two passages.

Between these two passages of narrator reaction to the lovemaking of Adam and Eve come those reactions of Satan's when he, too, as evening comes, sees Adam and Eve together. "O Hell! what doe mine eyes with grief behold" (4.358) is his first response when "still in gaze, as first he stood, / Scarce thus at length faild speech recoverd sad" (4.356–57)—and indeed sadness, nostalgia, is the overwhelming emotion of this passage for narrator and reader, too. Then, at the end of Eve's great speech about her own birth and first awakening, about the love she first felt for her own image and that might have, like Satan, "pin'd with vain desire" (4.466) but for the voice that led her to Adam (4.467), the narrator describes how she

> with eyes
> Of conjugal attraction unreprov'd,
> And meek surrender, half imbracing leand
> On our first Father, half her swelling Breast
> Naked met his under the flowing Gold
> Of her loose tresses hid: he in delight
> Both of her Beauty and submissive Charms
> Smil'd with superior Love, as *Jupiter*
> On *Juno* smiles, when he impregns the Clouds
> That shed *May* Flowers; and press'd her Matron lip
> With kisses pure.
>
> (PL 4.492–503)

The simile interposes reading space between smile and kiss, drawing out the erotic moment:[42] like the adjective "Matron" rather than "maiden" for Eve's lip, it leaves little doubt as to what happens next between the couple,[43] even as Satan himself turns aside, first with his exclamation about this "Sight hateful, sight tormenting!", and then with his reflection that he has learned something useful, the prohibition, with which to "excite thir minds" (4.523).

The narrator, like Adam here, and Satan, seems to be rather smitten by Eve, by that half of a swelling breast naked and touching Adam's but (to increase the erotic charge) "hid" beneath her loose tresses.[44] This is a common feature of

[42] Thomas Newton noted that the simile is understood as included in a parenthesis; see his edition of *Paradise Lost* (1749), Vol. 1, p. 267, cited by William Kerrigan "Milton's Kisses" in Dobranski and Rumrich, eds. *Milton and Heresy*, p. 127.

[43] Leonard points out that the mechanics of the simile are troubling, since Jupiter impregnates the clouds rather than Juno; this reminds Leonard of Ixion, who had sex with a cloud under the impression it was Juno. I doubt whether the allusion is supposed to take us so far into the complications of classical mythology here, given its sensual immediacy, but many readers are indeed troubled by the image. See chap. 8 below, on the Homeric resonance. Kerrigan, "Milton's Kisses", p. 134, n. 27, explains that "the mythological fancy here is that clouds are pregnant air", and cites "The Passion" (the poet's sorrows have "got a race of mourners on a pregnant cloud") and "L'Allegro," l. 74, where on barren mountains "labouring clouds do often rest."

[44] Turner, *One Flesh*, p. 76, compares the language of Proverbs, "Rejoice with the wife of thy

literature written by men. One of the best-known examples is Thomas Hardy's narrator who is more than a little in love with his heroine in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Here is Angel Clare's voyeuristic, early-morning sight of her:

> She had not heard him enter and hardly realised his presence there. She was yawning, and he saw the red interior of her mouth as if it had been a snake's. She had stretched one arm so high above her coiled-up cable of hair that he could see its satin delicacy above the sunburn; her face was flushed with sleep, and her eyelids hung heavy over their pupils. The brim-fullness of her nature breathed from her. It was a moment when a woman's soul is more incarnate than at any other time; when the most spiritual beauty bespeaks itself flesh; and sex takes the outside place in the presentation.[45]

This is only one of several passages that register the narrator's fantasies of penetration (the yawning mouth) but that also reveal his ambivalence: most of the passage goes on to emphasize the sleepiness (at the important moments in her life, Tess is often only partly conscious) and stresses the appeal, the physical incarnation of femaleness (a woman's soul) in her body. But all the language of the passage can do nothing to cancel the presence of that snake-in-the-mouth. Many critics recognize Hardy's uncertainty about sexuality in such passages, and no doubt this is part of what Henry James meant when he wrote to Robert Louis Stevenson that Tess's "pretence of 'sexuality' is equalled only by the absence of it."[46] Nor is the critic (James in this case) exempt any more

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youth . . . let her breasts satisfy thee at all times, and be thou ravished always with her love" (Prov. 5.18–19), but not much is hidden in those charming words.

[45] *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, ed. Scott Elledge (New York: W. W. Norton, [1965] 1991), pp. 132–33 (p. 198 of Wessex edition). That narrators can be influenced by, or drawn toward, their characters is argued by critics as various as John Bayley (*An Essay on Hardy*, p. 183, and Peter Widdowson, in *New Casebook* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), p. 2, also Penny Boumelha, *ibid.*, pp. 52–54: "the narrator's analytic omniscience is threatened both by his erotic commitment to Tess, and by the elusiveness of her sexuality." See Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of narration in *The Dialogic Imagination* or, on this point especially, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), pp. 103–31. Bakthin's distinction between epic and the novel is obviously not one I would want to follow here, since he did not regard epic as having any relevance to the time of writing (*Dialogic Imagination*, p. 31, and see chap. 2, nn. 5 and 16, above). Nor do I follow him in regarding Tolstoy as the monologic writer he needs for the contrast with Dostoevsky's polyphonic texts. On the sexual implications of the veil of Eve's hair, see chap. 8, below. Turner, *One Flesh*, p. 231, shows how Milton "develops an almost Pygmalion-like affection for his living image of Eve."

[46] James, quoted in Laura Claridge, "A Less than Pure Woman," in *Widdowson*, *New Casebook*, p. 71. Cf. *Tess*, Norton Critical Edition, p. 118:

> How very lovable her face was to him. Yet there was nothing ethereal about it: all was real vitality, real warmth, real incarnation. And it was in her mouth that this culminated. Eyes almost as deep and speaking he had seen before, and cheeks perhaps as fair; brows as arched, a chin and throat almost as shapely; her mouth he had seen nothing to equal on the face of

than the narrator or author from the necessarily revealing language of sexual desire. Granted that Hardy's language is the product of a late Victorian shift in attitudes towards sexuality, a transition for which he was partly responsible, we can still learn something from him about how erotically charged texts may be.

A whole series of questions are posed once we recognize with Bakhtin that narrators are not necessarily stable and independent of their narrations: whether the narrator's view is, like Satan's, explicitly fallen, even though he is trying to represent an unfallen woman, whether we need now to differentiate Milton and his constructed monologic narrator, as well as the "real" and "implied" author (to borrow terms from *The Rhetoric of Fiction*); whether Milton is deliberately contaminating the vision of woman in Paradise even here at its first presentation; finally, whether representation of the unfallen world is possible at all in a fallen vocabulary. Flannagan ad loc feels the need to insist that "in an innocent context, neither 'meek' nor 'surrender' seems to be negative in connotation, and the Epic Voice underscores the innocence with the word 'unreprov'd' (RM, n. 148, p. 457)." I am not sure why these words should be "negative" exactly, but they do help to express the sensuality that Milton wants to be possible in Paradise, and that the narrator's language explores. These issues are perhaps at their most poignant and powerful through all this welter of powerful sexual emotions.

In the passage from Book 4 that launched this Hardy and Bakhtin digression, it is as if the Jove-Juno simile infects the narrative around it, even before it arrives: it is Adam, after all, who smiles with "superior Love," and Eve whose "submissive Charms" delight, even though the two adjectives are derived from the image of Jupiter making love to Juno. In that context they are purely physical, referring to the position of the lovers, but when they spill out onto the narrative they of course infect the relation between Adam and Eve with a pagan and crudely postlapsarian hierarchy. As Kerrigan well puts it, "desire, as Milton and Kierkegaard and many others have represented it, is enmeshed in the polarities of dominance and submission. . . . Kissing can seem an oblivion. . . . Seventeenth-century poets in the Cavalier tradition surrendered to this oblivion, often distinguishing it from the fretful satisfactions of

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the earth. To a young man with the least fire in him that little upward lift in the middle of her red top lip was distracting, infatuating, maddening. He had never before seen a woman's lips and teeth which forced upon his mind, with such persistent iteration, the old Elizabethan simile of roses filled with snow.

The note in the Norton edition records that on 23 July 1889, Hardy had made this entry in his notebook: "Of the people I have met this summer, the lady whose mouth recalls more fully than any other beauty's the Elizabethan metaphor 'Her lips are roses full of snow' (or is it Lodge's?) is Mrs. Hamo Thornycroft—whom I talked to at Gosse's dinner." It also specifies that in fact the lines are Campion's. There is a fine brief passage on the importance of the mouth in *Paradise Lost* in Kerrigan, "Milton's Kisses," pp. 118–19. See also chap. 8, below.

intercourse. Milton, even as he submits to their topos, will not let us forget intercourse, conception, family, worship, hierarchy, history, all."[47]

At moments like these we recognize that this narrator is a complex modern personality, and as he views the scenes he constructs for us, he often comments—on sexuality, politics, and sexual politics. In the midst of the above passages, for example, he intrudes a famous political and characteristically distancing comment in an effort to restore his independence and his adversarial relation to Satan. At the end of Satan's first speech of reaction to the loving couple (O Hell!), in which Satan claims to melt at their innocence but feels compelled by his imperial mission to do what else, though damned, he would abhor, the narrator remarks: "So spake the Fiend, and with necessitie, / The Tyrants plea, excus'd his devilish deeds" (4.393–94). So far, so clear.[48] Yet given the immediacy of the scene Satan has just been witnessing, surely the comment invites us to spot the real motivation concealed by the "excuse"—not politics but sexual jealousy.

Immediately the narrative becomes confused again, as Satan, apparently still in the shape of a cormorant, flies down and takes on various other shapes among the animals of the peaceable Kingdom—a lion, then a tiger, then . . . , but then in mid-line one or the other of our first parents starts to speak, and it is some moments before the recurrent problem of pronoun reference and double syntax allows us to decide which one, and therefore which of Adam or Satan is the "him" who listens:

> Then as a Tyger, who by chance hath spi'd
> In some Purlieu two gentle Fawnes at play,
> Strait couches close, then rising changes oft
> His couchant watch, as one who chose his ground
> Whence rushing he might surest seize them both
> Grip't in each paw: When *Adam* first of men
> To first of women *Eve* thus moving speech,
> Turnd him all eare to hear new utterance flow.
>
> (PL 4.403–10)

It may seem at first as if the "him" is the last male mentioned, Adam, who thus turns to hear his wife speak. But these are the first words spoken by human beings in the poem: would they be given to the woman (though she does have the last words)? And we will quickly realize that Milton's syntax appears to omit some verb like "began" from the "when"-clause, leaving the participal "moving" to do its duty. Thus the "him" is in fact Satan, and the verb "Turnd" governs it as an internal accusative or reflexive pronoun. So

[47] Kerrigan, "Milton's Kisses," p. 132.

[48] On whether the tyrant in question is more like Charles I or Cromwell, see chap. 1.14, n. 89, above. Cf. also Adam to God after the Fall: "strict necessitie / Subdues me, and calamitous constraint" (10.131–32; he is explaining why he needs to put the blame on his wife).

Satan, still presumably in the shape of that predatory "tyger," turns to listen to "new utterance," and one that we soon work out must be Adam's.

The effect of the syntactic confusion is to make us briefly uncertain who is to speak, to whom we are to listen, and who exactly is the listener. In Homer the formula that introduces and closes epic speeches is always as clear as could be, merely a sign that the audience is about to hear another voice than that of the poet. But in Milton, for the very first speech of our primal ancestors, the objective clarity of Homer is traded for the kind of intimate, even passionate, certainly interested, involvement with the narrative that Satan has.[49] Even the typical language of the epic simile ("as a Tyger") has been used for the shape-shifter himself, collapsing the clear distinctions of Homeric narrative and once more aligning the language of epic with Satan, altering its conventional meaning. As Fowler puts it, "The momentary uncertainty is enough to give the impression that Satan has insinuated himself into Adam's grammatical place."

This complex narration does not stop here. Another example is the remarkable passage in Book 5 when the angel Raphael has come to visit. The narrator clearly "knows all about predatory gazes and projects back onto the occasion the perspective that would turn Eve into a topless and bottomless waitress."[50] Yet he also separates the "then" from the "now" of the narration—insistently:

> Mean while at Table *Eve*
> Ministerd naked, and thir flowing cups
> With pleasant liquors crown'd: O innocence
> Deserving Paradise! if ever, then,
> Then had the Sons of God excuse to have bin
> Enamour'd at that sight; but in those hearts
> Love unlibidinous reign'd, nor jealousie
> Was understood, the injur'd Lovers Hell.
>
> (PL 5.443–50)

The narrator imagines a fallen personality like himself unable to resist Eve's charms, and quickly adds a "but" as if to withdraw himself and the equally enchanted reader from this drooling. The Sons of God come in curiously to take over the guilt, and we can get back to innocence: "but in those hearts / Love unlibidinous reign'd" (unlike the kind of love that *we* know when in our "pleasant liquors").

The reference within this narratorial aside has a still longer reach. The story the narrator refers to here is in fact one of the original stories that accounted

[49] For more on this kind of contrast with Homer, see chap. 8, below. Cf. the dramatic desire of the narrator to intervene that opens this book, 4, 1–8: "O for that warning voice . . . "

[50] Regina Schwartz, "Rethinking Voyeurism and Patriarchy," *Representations*, p. 93, and idem, *Remembering and Repeating*, pp. 54–59.

for the Fall toward our current state, that the so-called Watcher angels (supposed to protect us) fell for the beautiful daughters of men. The parallel between this story, deriving from the fragment of it remaining at Genesis 6.1–4, preceding the flood narrative, and the Eve story, had often been noted, and Milton here shows himself fully aware of it. Largely because of Paul's citations of it, the Adam and Eve story had supplanted the Watcher story as the one that explains how the world got to be in its current lousy state. But the older Watcher story was never entirely forgotten; it survives in the Church Fathers, especially Origen, and in medieval literature (especially through the survival of parts of the *Book of Enoch*, where the story is told at some length).[51] Thus into the relations of narrator/reader and Eve is folded an older and still resonant version of the primal Sin. And yet, the narrator appears to forgive those original Sons of God, so caught up is he in the powerful charge of Eve's naked innocence.

What is more, the passage requires us to ask who it is that makes the comment about jealousy as the injured "Lovers Hell"? In the previous book, we saw, Satan's jealousy was amply demonstrated, and we also noticed the parallel established by the reference to hypocrisy between Satan, narrator, and at least some readers, those who are loath to admit to an unfallen sexuality in Eden. So here, even though Satan is himself absent from the encounter with Raphael, at least from the outer narrative, here in this scene is the most powerful and destructive of the emotions he experiences, and that the narrator—for this is his comment—knows only too well. Like Satan, the narrator understands how complicated is his own reaction to this scene, and also like Satan ("and could love, so lively shines / In them Divine resemblance, and such grace / The hand that formed them on thir shape hath pourd"; 4.363–65) longs for a time of loving innocence. Turner sees this as Milton's own emotion, and in a fine passage imagines him virtually courting Eve:

> At these peaks of excitement we see a naïve, transparant Milton, not the manipulator of fallen responses but the agent of unexamined passions. His presentation of Eve, a kind of surrogate courtship, is thus as personal as the invocations that tell of his blindness and misfortune, or the sonnet on his dead wife, or the private speculation that the desire of the Sons of God might have been entirely good. As in his reckless divorce tracts, Milton bares his own emotion in order to revitalize the Paradise myth for the Sons of God among his own people. Here he seems to speak from a position of uneasy intimacy, both privileged and abashed; he is not quite a stranger in Paradise, and not quite a member of the innocent party, but

[51] See Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, pp. 147–81; Turner, *One Flesh*, pp. 268–71, discusses Milton's uncertainty about the Genesis and Enoch fragments. See also Edward E. Ericson, Jr., "The Sons of God in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*," *Milton Quarterly* 25 (1991): pp. 79–89.

> he offers himself as the leader of the intruding group and the orchestrator of their tensions.[52]

This sounds convincing to me, except that, given the complexity of the narrative methods employed in the poem, it makes more sense to ascribe these feelings to a constructed narrator who is as eager to acknowledge the Satanic infection as he is desperate, by a knowing honesty, to free himself from it.

[52] Turner, *One Flesh*, p. 272.

FOUR

MY SELF AM HELL

> The heart of man is the place the devill dwels in;
> I feel sometimes a hell within myself.
> —SIR THOMAS BROWNE, *Religio Medici*

The eminent biologist, Richard Lewontin, once wrote that however important Aristotelian rhetorical analysis may be for the history of science, it will not tell us why we accept what we otherwise would not believe simply because it is well put. His example is Milton's Satan:

> Although every moral and political conviction I have speaks against it, I am nearly driven by Milton's insidious poetry to believe that it is "Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven." (PL 1.263) For a pedagogical Aristotle this would be a particularly fine example of an "antithesis" in the "periodic" mode dissected in Book III, Part 9: the parallel but opposing structure, "Better to . . . , than to . . . " the contrast of functionally linked "reign" and "serve," the final antitheses of "Heaven" and "Hell," two words beginning with the same sound but with different endings. For me however it is an almost irresistibly seductive flight of English speech, a Siren music that can be withstood only by lashing myself to the mast of my convictions. Many times more dangerous than "mere" rhetoric, artful language creates its own logic.[1]

In this chapter I want to follow Lewontin's lead by reading that "Siren music" as the source of Satan's appeal. I shall insist not on "evil," but on the ability of literature to make us feel it, not the concept contained somehow in Satan's speeches but the power of speech itself, "almost irresistibly seductive." But I shall concentrate not on the public and political self that Milton constructs for

[1] *New York Review of Books*, 6 Mar. 1997, p. 51. Both Alastair Fowler and John Leonard suggest ad loc, that the thought, like its opposite, was proverbial. See, e.g., Ps. 84.10, *Odyssey* 11.488, Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound* 965, / Leonard says Milton's version is close to Phineas Fletcher, *The Apollyonists* (1627) 1.20: "To be in heaven the second he disdaines: / So now the first in hell, and flames he raignes." Fowler also quotes *The Purple Island* (1633) 7.10: "In heav'n they scorn'd to serve, so now in hell they reigne." But there are indeed many parallels. Hughes ad loc, followed by Fowler, suggests a parody of a remark of Julius Caesar in Plutarch's *Life* (11.2) that he would rather be the first man in an Alpine village than second in Rome, and both also cite Serafino Salandra's Lucifer (*Adamo Caduto* 2.1) telling Belial that he would rather be first (*Duce*) in Hell than a mere prince in heaven. On Prometheus, see R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, *Lucifer and Prometheus: A Study of Milton's Satan* (London: Routledge, 1952), pp. 49–52, a Jungian reading. See also Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, pp. 86–87, 141, 176.

his heroic Satan, but the private interior self. We move now from that physical Hell in which he reigns to the private Hell in which he is imprisoned. In many ways that inner self is more impressive, more appealing, and more dangerously infectious.

1. *Niphates*

"Evil be thou my Good" (PL 4.110),[2] Satan's famous and despairing cry whereby he makes his crucial choice, is part of the great speech of self-exploration and self-accusation that Satan makes on Mount Niphates once he has landed on the new Earth. The cry intensifies, through the rhetorical figure of paradox, the plan evolved earlier to bring evil out of good. He recognizes that it was Pride and worse Ambition that threw him down, that he had no good reason to rebel, he acknowledges that he fell of his own free will, and discovers that Hell is not the place he just left behind but his own state of mind.

> Me miserable! which way shall I flie
> Infinite wrauth, and infinite despaire?
> Which way I flie is Hell; my self am Hell;
> And in the lowest deep a lower deep
> Still threatning to devour me opens wide,
> To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n.
> O then at last relent: is there no place
> Left for Repentance, none for Pardon left?
> None left but by submission; and that word
> *Disdain* forbids me, and my dread of shame.
>
> (PL 4.73–82)

Again there is that play with the words that "begin with the same sound" but have such "different endings," and we realize this rhetorical fact is not "mere[ly] rhetoric[al]": the ending is not only in the sound, and we begin to suspect that Milton is exploiting the contrasting shape of these sounds for a larger purpose, the shape of his narrative. What is it, then, that accounts for the different endings, in Hell or in Heaven? Ultimately the answer is the problem that substitutes for God in the poem, and who through his Miltonic amanuensis controls the structure of the narrative—but in this speech the difference is primarily psychological, and tragic.

Satan urges himself to relent, only to discover the truth in what he's just said, "my self am Hell," for in addressing himself in this dialogue of one, he is

[2] On "Good" here, see chap. 1.1, above: it shifts around between "righteousness" and "benefit" at least, and is defined only by its opposite. These supposedly Platonic absolutes were already reduced in that famous passage in Milton's *Areopagitica* (quoted in the previous chapter) to "twins" that come into the world "cleaving together" and are only with great difficulty, like mixed beans, sorted asunder.

addressing Hell, and Hell is defined by damnation, by the inability to repent. This speech registers what it would feel like to be damned. "For never can true reconcilement grow / Where wounds of deadly hate have peirc'd so deep" (4.98–99), and the word "deep" again picks up what was initially a physical measure of distance from God's Heaven and turns it into an inner state.

Milton seems thus to equate the inner, bottomless depths of the modern self with Hell. In damnation do we truly know ourselves. No doubt Martin Luther and Jean Calvin are responsible for this: the English Puritan William Perkins summarizes their case, and traces it back, as they both do, to St. Augustine, not only to the inwardness of the *Confessions*, but to the theology of the corrupt will, and thence to God:

> The cause of the decree of God in rejecting some is unsearchable . . . Augustine, epist. 105, saith very well: *Who* (saith he) *created the reprobates but God? And why, but because it pleased him? But why pleased it him? Oh man, who art thou that disputest with God*.[3]

The anxiety of a post-Reformation intellectual whose salvation rests on the unknowable and unfathomable issue of faith was already fully dramatized by Marlowe. Doctor Faustus faces a Protestant dilemma of alienation within the newly isolated soul. In the theological context it was often the Devil's damnation that provoked the strongest polemic, and the deepest anguish. It may be true that you can wriggle off the theological hook of God's responsibilty, but the psychological one still pricks. It may be that God finds Satan's will to be evil rather than creating it so, and even that God manipulates the poor victim, as Luther insists, yet "Satan will not cease to be evil in virtue of this movement of God."[4] But knowing that will not help. Despair may be healthy, as Luther thought, or a sign of predestinate evil (Calvin), but which is which? Satan stands for us all in these depths.

Perhaps more than any other feature, this is what makes Milton's Satan so appealing, and the epic what I have called "Satanic." Though other characters speak in soliloquy (Abdiel during the War, Adam and Eve both before and after the Fall),[5] Satan's are the most significant: he has five, and each is rather

[3] William Perkins, *A Golden Chain: or, The Description of Theology* (1591), quoted by David Bevington in the excellent Introduction to *Doctor Faustus*, Revels Plays, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p. 12.

[4] *Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Doubleday, 1961), p. 193. For the idea of God, see Paul Sellin, "The Hidden God: Reformation Awe in Renaissance English Literature," in *The Darker Vision of the Renaissance*, ed. R.S. Kinsman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 147–96. See also Susan Snyder, "The Left Hand of God: Despair in Medieval and Renaissance Tradition," *Studies in the Renaissance* XII (1965), pp. 18–59.

[5] J. B. Broadbent, *Some Graver Subject: An Essay on* Paradise Lost (London: Chatto, 1960), p. 80, suggested that only fallen characters soliloquize, but, as John Leonard points out, even Adam's first

what Fowler ad loc calls a "dramatic interior duologue." In them he manifests that inner depth we have come to expect in literature, at least since Faustus, or since Hamlet (another Lutheran product of Wittenberg) claimed to have "that within which passeth show." Whatever his moral stature, a soliloquy brings the hero close to the audience, for whom, as we all sense in the theater, the speech is really delivered. Richard III already, but more so the later Shakespearean inventions of Iago or Macbeth, invite us to join in their deliberations and their tragic awareness of what they are doing.[6] It was this, more even than his heroic defiance of God, that led certain eighteenth-century readers to declare themselves for Satan's "high superior nature," even though he was also "big with absurdity."[7] Milton's Satan is the ancestor of all those characters in Romantic literature, from Byron's Cain or Manfred and Mary Shelley's nameless monster to Dostoevsky's underground man, who articulate this negative, self-destructive state and make it their raison d'être.[8]

Milton makes his Satan discover/invent this modern state of subjectivity through becoming a subject. He is a "subject" in our contemporary theoretical sense (the "humanist subject"), and certainly his troubled "I" is prominent in the poem. But he is a "subject" also in the more literal, root sense of the term (*sub iectus*, thrown under): he discovers at the moment of his rebellion just what it means to be subject to God. Subjection is the origin of his subjectivity. And he doesn't like it at all. The result is that he is thrown out and down and under, into Hell, and it is as he emerges from there that he also emerges into full subjectivity in the Niphates speech, a dramatic soliloquy in the tragic Shakespearean mode.[9] He explores himself, and finds he is exploring

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words are spoken in soliloquy (there is no one else around with whom to speak). Tormented soliloquies like Satan's, though, are only possible after the Fall.

[6] The fullest case for the tragic hero (Faustus, Macbeth, Beatrice-Joanna, Ferdinand) as a precursor of Satan is made in Dame Helen Gardner, "Milton's Satan and the Theme of Damnation in Elizabethan Tragedy," reprinted in her *A Reading of Paradise Lost*, pp. 99–120. See also G. K. Hunter, *Paradise Lost*, pp. 87–90, on *Richard III* and *Macbeth*, and O. B. Hardison, Jr., "In Medias Res in *Paradise Lost*," *Milton Studies* 17, ed. James D. Simmonds (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983), pp. 27–41.

[7] See, e.g., Joseph Addison, *Critical Essays from the* Spectator, ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 110–11; and generally Arthur E. Barker, "'And On His Crest Sat Horror': Eighteenth-Century Interpretations of Milton's Sublime and his Satan," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 11 (1942): pp. 421–36. The idea that Satan is the true hero of the epic was common in France as well as England during the period: see Roger Sharrock, "Godwin on Milton's Satan," *Notes and Queries*, New Series 9 (1962), pp. 463–65.

[8] Reviewed by J. B. Russell in *Mephistopheles* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 168–250. The classic account is Mario Praz, "The Metamorphoses of Satan," in *The Romantic Agony*, 2d ed. (Cleveland and New York: World Publishing, [1951] 1965), but see especially Lucy Newlyn, *Romantic Reader*, pp. 91–118.

[9] According to Milton's nephew, Edward Phillips, this passage was written "several years before the Poem was begun," when Milton was still intending to write a tragedy. These lines were "designed for the very beginning of the said tragedy"; Helen Darbishire, ed., *The Early Lives*, pp.

what it means to be in Hell, down and under. God and Heaven are what is high and unitary, while "depth" is that "profoundest Hell," and himself.[10] The oppositional war with God continues in these new terms, and this depth is now not only his refuge, but also the site of the battle he now wages: he appeals to Eve's own inner image of herself, and when he succeeds, Adam and Eve join him in this newly invented, Hellish interiority.

One reason for the power of Satan's exploration of himself, though, is that we have already experienced another such private/public voice: the narrator, who has expressed his personal anxieties in the form of an address to the Heavenly being whom he calls variously the Spirit, holy Light, or the Muse. In so doing he has used, even more obviously than Satan, the form of prayer, the intimate original of those various genres in which a single voice speaks its mind, from confession to soliloquy.[11] But whereas the epic voice speaks in the expectation of an answer, and indeed the poem itself may be seen as that

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72–73. Flannagan (RM, n. 16, p. 442) notes that a speech by Satan does not begin either of the outlines in the Trinity manuscript for "Adam unparadiz'd" He compares Claudius trying to repent in *Hamlet* 3.3.36–72, and Macbeth at 5.5.17–28. Harold Bloom thinks the parallel with Shakespeare diminishes Milton, since he avoids representing for us the crucial change whereby Lucifer turns into Satan; that is, the moment of choice. (*The Western Canon*, pp. 176–77).

Nonetheless, the Niphates Satan, I suggest, actually combines both aspects of the Shakespearean self that Bloom limns—the discovery of the inner nothing *and* the inner, narcissistic richness of which he cannot let go. G. K. Hunter, *Paradise Lost*, pp. 86–87, usefully compares Satan's speech with the opening of Grotius's *Adamus Exsul*, probably a source for Milton:

> Foe to the cruel thunderer, exiled from my heavenly home, I present myself in flight from the gloomy cave of Tartarus and the dark desert of eternal night. From those unlucky regions I have been drawn here by my hate for the good, turning over my criminal plans. I seek a crime which is terrifying, vile and awful, such as even I Satan tremble at.

The rhetoric here is Senecan, whereas Milton's is closer to the Elizabethan mode—subtle, probing character, denying what the audience might expect in a Senecan tragedy, more like Volpone's opening lines.

[10] For this point, see especially John Carey, "Milton's Satan," in Danielson, *Cambridge Companion to Milton*, pp. 131–46, on Satan's "depth," as well as Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 44–51, and her *Language, Gender, Power*, pp. 85–95, where she briefly describes *Samson Agonistes* as "a drama of interiority" and also makes the connection with the novel. The locus classicus for the exploration of the newly modern individual as subject is Descartes, in the preface to his *Meditations*, in *Philosophical Essays*, Library of Liberal Arts (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960), pp. 67–69.

[11] See Barabara Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 3, and passim. The book is a response to Louis Martz, *The Poetry Of Meditation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), and, taken together, the two books show how widespread in the seventeenth century were the various techniques of meditation for exploring the self, "a private rhetoric, a colloquy of self with self, which is no longer condemned but has instead been made into a rich mode of religious experience" (Paul Zweig, *The Heresy of Self-love* [New York: Basic, 1968], p. 55). See also Claude J. Summers, "The Bride of the Apocalypse and the Quest for True Religion: Donne, Herbert and Spenser," in *Bright Shootes of Everlastingnesse: The Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987), pp. 72–95.

answer, what makes Satan's speech so unbearably poignant, and modern, is that he knows the answer has been given once and for all—what the speech does is rehearse it in various forms—and he now speaks to no one but himself.

The doubleness of the Satan character should now be obvious: at this very moment in the poem, when he is from the theological point of view admitting that God was right, he shows himself to embody that subjectivity, those hidden depths, that are the source of his appeal to the reader, and that God lacks. God may be right, and Satan seems to say so, but the reader has, or believes himself to have, an inner self like Satan's, and experiences the split self as Satan does. God may be right, but it is Satan with whom we sympathize.[12] Never mind that the moral hierarchy of the poem is thereby seriously distorted.

2. *Faustus and the Abyss*

What prompted Milton to offer us this projection of our modern and divided selves—this inescapably sympathetic figure set within the discourse of a narrator who warns us off? The Niphates speech draws to a close with its famous aphorism, but then undercuts it with a half-expressed doubt about the extent of the power involved in that word "reigne":

> Evil be thou my Good; by thee at least
> Divided Empire with Heav'ns King I hold
> By thee, and more than half perhaps will reigne;
> As Man ere long, and this new World shall know.
>
> (PL 4.110–13)

The narrator then brings us back outside and describes Satan's face, his sudden awareness that it may have given him away were anyone watching (in fact Uriel was), and then condemns him as "the first / That practisd falshood under saintly shew" (4.121–22). I argued above, though, that the warning, on which critics such as Waldock and Fish have concentrated, is less impressive than the invitation to sympathize with the despair.

Here too, even more so, we find the same movement. The reader, on the conventional view, becomes the true hero, proving in himself the basic system of Christian belief and in so doing contrasting himself (humbly?) with Satan. The redemptive structure of the poem is repeated in the reader, constantly, with each Satanic occasion, but Satan himself is excluded (he excludes himself) from this redemptive possibility. His exclusion is a measure, finally, of the reader's salvation. He is damned, as I showed in the Introduction, that others

[12] In Alan Bennett's television drama *A Question of Attribution* (1991), Sir Anthony Blunt, about to be exposed as the fourth man in the greatest spy scandal of the twentieth century, replies to the Queen's searching question by saying that only God has no secret life. He comments that this must make his life, and him, rather dull.

may be saved. The one ending is Hell, the other Heaven. But the residual feeling is not self-satisfaction, but sympathy.

In a sense any didactic literature needs, as does Milton's narrator, to remind us of the larger purpose. But Fish's view of Satan's impact has become conventional and, over the years, a little too easy. Reading *Paradise Lost* becomes a melodrama, a fairground rollercoaster ride. Here we go again, a scream of excitement as we plunge down and then those gasps of relief as the ride restores us to equilibrium and two-footed verticality. What confidence we all show in the maker of the ride that it will hold us up and take us through to the end!

Well not, at least, within the Niphates speech. Milton does not make it at all easy to recover from these vertiginous plunges into the abyss of Satanic selfhood. (Indeed how could he, since this is where our own thoughts always lead us?) No more than he makes it always easy to distinguish between what it is that constitutes Satan and God. It is partly, as Lewontin noted, a matter of sound. The alliterative relation between Heaven and Hell is something for which the poem has special fondness, and it invites the ear to hear further similarity. In this respect, Milton was clearly learning from Dante, as we shall see briefly in Chapter 7, and from Marlowe. Mephistopheles it was who had said

> Why this is hell, nor am I out of it,
> Thinkst thou that I, who saw the face of God,
> And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,
> Am not tormented with ten thousand hells?[13]

The second version of this topos is even more terrifying:

> Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed
> In one self place; but where we are is hell
> And where hell is must we ever be.
> And, to conclude, when all the world dissolves,
> And every creature shall be purified,
> All places shall be hell that is not heaven.
>
> (2.1.124–29)

Milton's narrator deliberately echoes these words of Marlowe even before his Satan starts the Niphates speech:

> horror and doubt distract
> His troubl'd thoughts, and from the bottom stirr
> The Hell within him, for within him Hell
> He brings, and round about him, nor from Hell

[13] Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus* 1.3.78–81.

> One step no more then from himself can fly
> By change of place.
>
> (PL 4.18–23)

In *Doctor Faustus* Marlowe exploits the sounds, and so makes Hell a language game. Faustus "confounds hell in Elysium" (1.3.61), not simply mixing classical and Christian afterlife, but allowing the sound of Hell to spill into the first syllable of Elysium.

This word in turn was "Elizium" in Marlowe's spelling, suggesting another wordplay with a female name that would be highly evocative for his contemporary audience. No wonder Marlowe's contemporary and rival, Thomas Nashe, complained of those writers who thrust Elysium into Hell. Marlowe may not have known that the English word "Hell" is cognate with the Norse goddess "Hel," though if he did, it would give further point to another overlapping sound:

> Was this the face that launched a thousand ships
> And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?
> Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.

When this Hellish Helen (whom he has just called "heavenly Helen," 5.1.85) does kiss him, he immediately loses his soul and has to beg for it back:

> Her lips suck forth my soul: see where it flies!
> Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again.
> Here will I dwell, for heaven is in these lips,
> And all is dross that is not Helena.
>
> (5.1.91–97)

Faustus's desire is scholarly as well as sexual: he wants to abolish the gap that separates him from the classical past and from the beauty of Homer's Helen. Arguably that is what has damned him—the historian's desire for the unattainable past. What appears on stage, though, is actually at two removes from the beautiful woman of legend: she is technically a succubus (as the language shows with its talk of sucking forth the soul), therefore merely a devilish lookalike, and beneath the costume she is a boy, since the roles of women on the Elizabethan stage were played by boys.[14]

Marlowe, so far as we know, didn't believe in any of this. Like the Hellmouth prop that, in medieval drama, would remain on stage throughout the action, the Hellfire idea was a convention, a Christian fiction, and Marlowe was well beyond it: for him the Renaissance self that he was helping to stage

[14] See Forsyth, "'Heavenly Helen': Hell in *Dr. Faustus*," *Etudes de Lettres*, October–December, 1987: pp. 11–23. For the implications of this cross-dressing practice, see especially Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

had become the image of Hell. Milton, nonetheless, seems to have learned this idea and its language from him.

3. *God in Satan*

Unlike Marlowe, Milton had not entirely renounced the Christian worldview that spawned the images of Hell and its denizens. Thus he saw its problems more thoroughly and intimately. Milton complicates his Faustian Satan by further exploring his relation to God. The speech of Satan in fact contains some rhetorical oddities that establish curious likenesses to God. Just before he proclaims "Evil be thou my Good," he considers the possibility of escaping from this prison of the self. This is dramatically enacted in the speech in which he calls upon himself to repent. When we first read the speech, we think (do we not?) that it is God to whom Satan is appealing: "O then at last relent: is there no place / Left for Repentance, none for Pardon left?" (4.79–80). He is begging God to ease up, in fact to allow him to repent, to return him, as he says in a moment "By Act of Grace" to "my former state."

Of course, the speech has already made it rather difficult to tell who is being addressed at any moment. It began as an address to the sun ("how I hate thy beams"), but even there, the language is slippery. Sun sounds like "Son," a common pun. In Satan's case it is especially appropriate, since it was the Son's promotion, his "Begetting" or Exaltation that started the trouble and led to the rebellion: from the beginning Son and Satan are opposed, the enemy figures of the myth. Satan then moves into meditation about himself and God, using the third person "he" for God, and first person for himself. This continues for many lines of reflection until suddenly he starts addressing . . . well, whom? It quickly becomes clear it is himself.

> O had his powerful Destiny ordaind
> Me some inferiour Angel, I had stood
> Then happie; no unbounded hope had rais'd
> Ambition. Yet why not? som other Power
> As great might have aspir'd, and me though mean
> Drawn to his part; but other Powers as great
> Fell not, but stand unshak'n, from within
> Or from without, to all temptations arm'd.
> Hadst thou the same free Will and Power to stand?
> Thou hadst: whom hast thou then or what to accuse,
> But Heav'ns free Love dealt equally to all?
> Be then his Love accurst, since love or hate,
> To me alike, it deals eternal woe.
> Nay curs'd be thou.
>
> (PL 4.58–71)

And we wonder again, momentarily, who is being addressed. As this inner meditation continues, then, the divided self splits and produces two voices, then two selves, one of which accuses the other, and then curses it, and so himself. And the voice he then adopts is God's. This is another and even more powerful image of damnation.

Memory of his own recent past was what Augustine had identified in his own address to God, the *Confessions*, as the key ingredient in his sense of personal identity. But what Satan discovers, as in his own enactment of memory he recalls how he became what he is, is that not only can he not repent, but he cannot even, when he tries, address God. The stage convention of the soliloquy has become a prison of solipsism. He tries to say to God "O then at last relent," but he is the only one who replies, and the reply is negative. No relenting, no repentance, and again the sound of the words conveys more of the meaning: God will not relent, because you cannot repent.[15]

How different, then, is that God vainly addressed from the Satan who replies? He did it himself, we may say, yet who in this confusion of pronouns, is "he"? It is God doing it, says the theology, yet, as we watch Satan unable to get through to God, there is little question where our sympathies will go. And what is more, we know that God is responsible for Satan's plight—he says as much: "Man therefore shall find grace, / The other none" (3.131–32). The rhetoric of Satan has brought God into the text and equated him with the self of Satan.

Such is the terror of this Satanic idea of God that Origen, the greatest and most intelligent of the early Fathers, tried to save Christianity from it. He propounded a doctrine of *apokatastasis*, that even the Devil would be saved. For this he was attacked by Augustine and posthumously condemned in 543.[16] And Milton learned from this: he agreed with Augustine's God.[17] But he also holds out the possibility in this extraordinary Niphates speech that Satan might, as Origen imagined, be able to repent.

[15] An obsolete sense of "relent" is "repent" (*OED*), which makes the meaning of Satan's divided consciousness even more complex, as John Leonard points out to me: he could be deliberately addressing himself. But who then does his voice become? Keith W. F. Stavely thinks Milton's Arminianism makes him offer Satan grace at 3.501–52, the Jacob's ladder passage, but lines 523–25 ("whether to dare / The Fiend by easie ascent, or aggravate / His sad exclusion from the dores of Bliss") make this unlikely. Stavely also refers to the wonder that momentarily seizes Satan at sunrise (3.552–53), but this is immediately cancelled by envy, and then converted to the hate of the Niphates speech. These are not moments of Grace but signs of its absence.

[16] J. B. Russell, *Satan: the Early Christian Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981) pp. 144–48. See Harry F. Robins, *If This Be Heresy: a Study of Milton and Origen*, Illinois Studies in Language and Literature 51 (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1963).

[17] In *De doctrina Christiana 1.8* (YP 6.332), Milton deals with the problem posed by several biblical texts in both the Old and New Testaments: "God openly confesses that it is he who incites the sinner, hardens his heart, blinds him and drives him into error, [but] it must not be concluded that he is the originator even of the very smallest sin, for he is supremely holy." It is hard to imagine a less satisfactory way to solve the problem.

One way to read Satan's soliloquy, of course, is to take ourselves out of it and say it is merely Satan condemning himself. But another is to experience the absent God in the text as he is appealed to (even if it is only a misreading quickly canceled by the reader), and see how, momentarily, in the reader's consciousness at least, Satan and God have replaced each other.[18] Ultimately, as most sensitive readers of the poem recognize, the problem of Satan leads beyond itself to the problem of God. An omniscient and omnipotent God is merely toying with this defiant devil, and Satan is fulfilling his function within the narrative, and within Christian doctrine—to be the one who opposes omnipotence: he is the old enemy. In this speech, though, the problem becomes personal and inward to the reader, and so reproduces the way in which it had presumably become so for Satan, and led to his initial rebellion. His intelligence though fine could never have been perfect, since he had never been more than a high archangel:[19] God's announcement about the Son's exaltation is thus capable of provoking his jealousy, as it does, and as God knows it will.

4. *Hell in Heaven*

If God and Satan can at times seem so alike as to replace each other, so, too, can Heaven and Hell. It may even be true for Satan that it is better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven, since he tries to ignore, perhaps is already beginning to forget, the difference. As he greets the new place in his third speech of the poem, he welcomes it as his new Heaven, making a further splendid claim about himself, but if we listen to what it says, and to the structure of its saying, we hear something else:

> Farewel happy Fields
> Where Joy for ever dwells: Hail horrours, hail
> Infernal world, and thou profoundest Hell
> Receive thy new Possessor: One who brings
> A mind not to be chang'd by Place or Time.
> The mind is its own place, and in it self
> Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.
> What matter where, if I be still the same.
>
> (PL 1.249–56)

The alliteration on the breathing h-words begins with the "Hail" and "horrours" and "Hell," "profoundest" as in the "deep" associations noted previously. And if the mind can indeed make either Heaven or Hell in itself, what

[18] On the similar moment at the climax of *Paradise Regain'd*, when "he" falls from the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem, see chap. 11, section 6, below.

[19] On the archangel's imperfect knowledge, see *De doctrina Christiana* (YP 6:227); full knowledge was the Father's alone.

the mind who says these words has made is not a Heaven of Hell but a Hell of Heaven.

Yet this idea that the mind is its own place is in fact a magnificent heresy—the first of several Christian heresies Milton puts into Satan's mouth—based on Stoic doctrine,[20] that inwardness is all, that there is no place called "Tartaros" (even though that Greek idea appears in the *koinē* language of the New Testament, at 2 Peter 2.4; Hades occurs 10 times),[21] and that Hell and Heaven are indeed to be found only within the mind. Satan seems here to invent the heresy, and immediately to believe it, but it was a common though subterranean version of Christian doctrine, that "the Kingdom of God is within you" and therefore we have Heaven and Hell within ourselves.[22] We should not then differentiate too readily between what Satan says and the truth. Nor should we prejudge the structure that is to dominate the poem: within the antithesis of this line, it is true, the making a Hell of Heaven comes last, and may be thought to cancel the reverse possibility, but viewed from another point of view, the chiastic structure of the line encloses Hell within Heaven. As the narrator comments when Satan comes back to his senses after being briefly touched by Eve's graceful innocence, "The hot Hell that alwayes in him burnes, / Though in mid Heav'n, soon ended his delight, / And tortures him now more" (9.467–69).

Hell within Heaven! The closeness of those mighty opposites is the key to what Milton does with them, and to what they are felt to be like. I think Milton knew this, and felt the need from time to time to insist on the proper distinction. So in this case he continues the speech beyond the famous line. It does not end with "Better to reign in Hell, then serve in Heav'n," but with a variant slightly less grand, and perhaps this time genuinely despairing. Satan suggests to his companion Beelzebub that they call their "associates and copartners of our loss," the other fallen angels, off the "oblivious Pool" where they still lie astonished by their fall, and decide whether

> once more
> With rallied Arms to try what may be yet
> Regaind in Heav'n, or what more lost in Hell?
>
> (PL 1.268–70)

[20] In Count Camillo Cerdogni's (Cardonyn's) personal album at Geneva in 1639, Milton wrote "Coelum non animum muto dum trans mare curro," which adapts Horace's *Epistle* 11.27, "*Caelum non animam, mutant qui trans mare currunt.*" See French, *Life Records*, Vol. 1, p. 419.

[21] *OED*, s. v. "Hell."

[22] Hughes ad loc refers to Jacob Boehme, *The Threefold Life of Man*, 14.72, and Christopher Hill, *Milton and Revolution*, p. 33, notes that Boehme's translator, Charles Hotham, was a contemporary of Milton's at Christ's College, Cambridge. Hill also notes, pp. 308–11, the many contemporary parallels among radicals for the idea of Hell and Heaven as internal. In Milton, though, Hell is both a place and a state of mind, on which see generally D. P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964). In his Penguin edition, John Leonard locates the heresy as Amalric of Bena's, condemned in 1204, but still attracting seventeenth-century sects.

The speech ends there, and the emphasis corrects that earlier balance and shifts us, not so much to the self, but towards loss and Hell as what is truly Satanic. And this is quietly confirmed by the version of these words given to Abdiel during the war (later in the poem, earlier in the chronology). Serving the worthier (God) is not servitude, he says: rather serving the unworthy, as Satan's followers now do.

> Reign thou in Hell thy Kingdom, let mee serve
> In Heav'n God ever blest, and his Divine
> Behests obey.
>
> (PL 6.183–85)

This is a splendid comeback to Satan's rhetoric, which now may seem more like the posturing the narrator had called it.

But the most important distinction of this kind is not between Satan and the minor figure of Abdiel, but between Satan's exploration of these interior depths and Adam's after the Fall. The parallels are very close: at his moment of extreme despair, Adam (who has now also discovered soliloquy as interior duologue) sees himself as Satanic as he panics about death:

> Thus what thou desir'st
> And what thou fearst, alike destroyes all hope
> Of refuge, and concludes thee miserable
> Beyond all past example and future,
> To *Satan* only like both crime and doom.
> O Conscience, into what Abyss of fears
> And horrors hast thou driv'n me; out of which
> I find no way, from deep to deeper plung'd!
>
> (PL 10.837–45)

Adam addresses his inner self as his "Conscience," here, and the word resonates with the Calvinist theological tradition and also with that parallel word—indistinguishable in French—"consciousness."[23] Eventually, though it takes a long stretch of marvellous narrative, through a bitter and then finally loving dialogue with Eve, Adam does emerge from this Abyss and discovers a way to salvation. He recalls the promise made in the garden "that thy Seed shall bruise / The Serpents head" (10.1031–32).[24] This text, Milton's version of the *protevangelium*, is a key to the Christian version of the combat myth,[25] and reminds us that the battle between these cosmic enemies is now to con-

[23] R. A. Waswo, "Damnation, Protestant Style: Macbeth, Faustus and Christian Tragedy," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 4(1): (1974) 63–85.

[24] Georgia Christopher, *Milton and the Science of the Saints* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982) pp. 163–72, and see chap. 10, below.

[25] See Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, pp. 266–72, 346–47, and Russell, *Satan*, p. 72.

tinue on the earthly plane: one immediate result is that true repentance like Adam's (and conspicuously unlike Satan's) can bring pardon. And it leads on, as Milton fully exploits the idea of interiority, not to an old heresy, that the mind is its own place, but to a new discovery, the promise that Adam will find "A paradise within thee, happier farr" (12.587) than the Earthly Paradise they are forced to leave.

This Adversary/Adam pair begins the same way as do those other verbally balanced pairs, Dante's Dis/Dio, and Milton's own Devil/Deity and Hell/Heaven,[26] but their endings differ: Satan remains storm-tossed but Adam can move on to a place of rest or a safe haven. A person may plunge through meditation or adventurous self-exploration into that interior Hell discovered by the Reformation, and nonetheless be granted a way out and back to light. The difference, in Milton's bourgeois myth at least, is a wife.[27]

5. *Witchcraft*

If Satan's command of the interior world of modernity helps to render him deeply sympathetic at certain moments, it also makes him sinister. He it is who can induce thoughts and visions beyond the control of our conscious minds. Descartes famously worried about this: "What am I [if] there is a certain spirit who is extremely powerful and malicious, and who uses all his abilities . . . to deceive me?"[28] Milton waits until Book 5 to develop this possibility, allowing the Niphates speech, in which we discover this interiority, and the remarkable Garden scenes of Book 4 to have their full effect. But then he shows twice within one Book how Satan can spread his newly discovered—and secret—interiority to others. As the rebellion episode extends we come quickly to the midnight episode in which he first involves another angel in his thoughts. And it is never quite clear whether he does so by waking and whispering to his companion, or by addressing him in sleep.

> Sleepst thou Companion dear, what sleep can close
> Thy eye-lids? and remembrest what Decree
> Of yesterday, so late hath past the lips
> Of Heav'ns Almightie. Thou to me thy thoughts
> Wast wont, I mine to thee was wont to impart;
> Both waking we were one; how then can now
> Thy sleep dissent?
>
> (PL 5.673–79)

[26] PL 1.373; see chap. 1, n. 41, above, and chap. 7, below.

[27] See chap. 10 below. On the importance of the couple, see Joseph Summers, "The Two Great Sexes," in *The Muses' Method* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), pp. 87–111, and Diane McColley, *Milton's Eve* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983), pp. 22–42.

[28] Descartes, "Second Meditation," *Philosophical Essays*, p. 83. See also his "First Meditation," pp. 76–80.

At this stage, the speech could be addressed still to the sleeping Beelzebub, into whose "unwarie brest" Satan infuses "Bad influence" (5.694–95). It gradually turns into a Shakespearean conspiracy-speech as he gives orders to gather in "The Quarters of the North" (5.689). But it remains a private address to a beloved and intimate angel long enough to suggest the source of Satan's influence: he gets into your most private space, even your sleep.

A little earlier in Book 5 than the address to Beelzebub, Satan inspires a troubling but powerful dream in Eve's subconscious. The episode links Satan to contemporary notions of witchcraft.

With the publication in 1484 of the Papal Bull known as the *Malleus Maleficarum* began the horrifying persecution of witches, usually as heretics, by the Church authorities. At the popular level, and in the thousands of records of actual trials preserved in various parts of Europe,[29] the witches have various ways of accounting for their activities, from magical healing to resentment at the power of a neighbor to hostility to the Church or its priest. But common to many is the language of dream-vision. Nonetheless, in the theological account of witchcraft, imposed on the words of a victim during the trials, everything depends on the power of Satan to provoke heresy; the standard accusation is of renouncing the Catholic church, the saints, and everything that is God's in order to accept Satan as her new master. Once again, the basic myth of an ongoing combat with Satan informs the perceptions and language of the Christian. Indeed this was one of the dominant forms in which the combat was lived by the ordinary believer of the seventeenth century.[30]

[29] Eva Maier, *Trente ans avec le diable* (Lausanne: Cahiers Lausannois d'Histoire Médiévale, 1996) is one among many accounts based on local records. See Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen, eds., *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), and Darren Oldridge, ed., *The Witchcraft Reader* (London: Routledge, 2001). For feminist analysis of confessions and the argument that alleged witches, normally poor women, used the idea of a satanic pact to fashion their own identities and make sense of traumatic events in their lives, see Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil* (London: Routledge, 1994), esp. chap. 10, and Louise Jackson, "Women, Wives and Mothers: Witchcraft Persecutions and Women's Confessions in Seventeenth Century England," in *Women's History Review* 4 (1995): 63–83.

[30] Norman Cohn showed in *Europe's Inner Demons* (London: Pimlico, [1964] 1993), pp. 61–73, that the idea of a satanic cult predated the witch-hunts. It is found in allegations against heretics and Jews from the early period, as we saw in chap. 1, and re-emerged, for example, in charges made against the followers of Saint Francis of Assisi, the Fraticelli. For parallels with modern fears of satanic ritual abuse, see Philip Stevens, "The Demonology of Satanism," in James Richardson, Joel Best, and David Bromley, eds., *The Satanism Scare* (New York: Lexington Books, 1991), pp. 35–36. The charge of ritual child-murder, which Cohn memorably discusses, comes up in Milton's description of Sin as a serpent armed with mortal sting, which is completed in the following lines.

> Nor uglier follow the Night-Hag, when call'd
> In secret, riding through the Air she comes
> Lur'd with the smell of infant blood, to dance
> With *Lapland* Witches, while the labouring Moon
> Eclipses at thir charms.
>
> (PL 2.662–66)

On the face of it, perhaps, Milton's heroic, articulate, and self-conscious Satan is as far removed as possible from the furtive Satan of the witches, who lurked in forests and in the fertile imaginations of the Dominican torturers licensed by the *Malleus Maleficarum*. But this latter version of Satan is suggested by some details in *Paradise Lost*: he conceives his first rebellious plan, as we have just seen, at midnight, the witching hour, and it is a variant of the witches' Satan who first tempts Eve, in the episode of Eve's demonic dream. Satan has crept into the Garden of Eden and found Eve sleeping beside Adam. "Squat like a Toad" (a common form of the witches' familiar) at Eve's ear, Satan busies himself with distorting "The Organs of her Fancie." The content of the dream suggests, but does not make explicit, that it is the prototype of all those nocturnal experiences, whether dreamed or real, aspects of the witch-craze that burned throughout Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in which women rode or flew away to cavort in the forest with the Devil, or the Black Man, or the Evil One, as the main figure of these nocturnal excitements was variously called. *Paradise Lost* has been studied as an encyclopedic assemblage of many different, perhaps all literary, genres,[31] but one that has not always been remembered is that of the confession of the witch trial—in historical cases often forced out by judicial torture and made to conform to the judges' preconceptions.[32]

Paradise Lost often extends itself geographically in this way, and the move here produces a typical overlapping of popular and mythological lore: the lines translate Ovid's description of Scylla (*Met.* 14.50–74), and allude also to the common belief of the time that Lapland was where witches came from. Especially in the idea of infant blood, the full horror of Satan's associations (via Hecate to Sin) begin to show through. See Hughes's note ad loc, citing Milton's *Muscovia*, CM 10.361. Svendsen, *Milton and Science*, p. 75, thinks it possible Milton believed in witches, but John M. Steadman, "Eve's Dream and the Conventions of Witchcraft," in his *Milton's Biblical and Classical Imagery* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1984), p. 166, cannot agree. Flannagan (RM, n. 174, p. 401) notes that by 1667 witchcraft was generally disbelieved in England, citing Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), pp. 570–83. Leonard's edition in its excellent, understated way cites Lucan, *Pharsalia* 6.499–506, as a source for both the idea of witches causing a lunar eclipse and for drinking infant blood, and gives a full list of parallel passages and potential sources for the Scylla image. On Lucan and Milton, see David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[31] See, for example, Lewalski, *Rhetoric*. A typical reading of the dream is Howard Schultz, "Satan's Serenade," *Philological Quarterly* 27 (1948): 17–26. It combines standard moralizing misogyny toward Eve ("the gravest of her faults," "a measure of vanity and willfulness") with a philosophical analysis of Adam's scientific view of sleep, a brief review of the sensuous and adulterous background in the Troubadours, Francis Pilkington, and Henry Lawes, as well as Milton's own First Prolusion ("Whether Day or Night is the more excellent"), and *Comus*. But it never mentions witchcraft. William B. Hunter, "Eve's Demonic Dream," *ELH* 13 (1946), and Steadman, "Eve's Dream," both do see the links, and discuss the theological and scientific contexts extensively.

[32] Christina Larner, *Enemies of God* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1981) and *Witchcraft and Religion* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984) places special emphasis on the role of the learned fear of

Next morning, Eve tells Adam about her dream. Her account (5.35–60) recalls the Song of Solomon and the language of Renaissance love poetry,[33] but it includes several elements common to the witch experiences, including the nocturnal summons, the sexual flattery and excitement, the moonlight adventure, the plant or drug that gives special powers (in this case the tree itself), the appearance at the appointed place of the angelic and/or bestial Satan, and the illusion of flight.[34] The Satan figure is filtered through two narrators, Eve and the epic voice, but he still comes across as enormously seductive. "Methought," Eve says to Adam, "Close at mine ear one call'd me forth to walk / With gentle voice, I thought it thine." The voice then repeats (or anticipates) what it says to the unwary Beelzebub:

> Why sleepst thou *Eve*? now is the pleasant time,
> The cool, the silent, save where silence yields
> To the night-warbling Bird, that now awake
> Tunes sweetest his love-labor'd song; now reignes
> Full Orb'd the Moon, and with more pleasing light
> Shadowie sets off the face of things.
>
> (PL 5.38–43)

The "night-warbling Bird" is the nightingale, whose song has already been Milton's figure for his own inspiration at 3.38–40: "as the wakeful Bird / Sings darkling, and in shadiest Covert hid / Tunes her nocturnal Note". Roy Flannagan (RM, n. 21, p. 417) has a full and fine note on the nightingale, showing that the bird is accurately presented (it is shy, so sings in shadiest covert and after dark). He also points out (RM, n. 15, p. 476) the problem with the sex of the nightingale, first noted by the eighteenth-century editor Thomas Newton: at 4.602 it is a she, but here it is masculine, accurate for the natural songbird and suggestive for the Satanic use of his voice to seduce Eve. But then Flan-

satanism in witch trials. See also Joseph Klaits, *Servants of Satan* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1985). Carlo Ginzburg, *I Benandanti* (English trans. *The Night Battles*) shows how the connection grew in the judges' mind between witchcraft and heresy, annulling any distinction between white and black magic. For the connection of sex and witchcraft, see R.E.L. Masters, *Eros and Evil* (New York: Julian Press, 1962; Baltimore: Penguin, 1974). As Keith Thomas shows in *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (Harmondsworth: Penquin, 1973) pp. 616–28, the women were mostly poor, desperate, and excluded. See generally George L. Burr, *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases 1648–1706* (New York: Scribner's, 1914, reprint 1959). On devils and dreams, see Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

[33] "The pleading voice and the dewy-haired angel suggest the lover of Song of Solomon 5.2, and the sequence 'I rose as at thy call, but found thee not; / To find thee I directed then my walk' corresponds exactly to the verses following" (Hughes ad loc). See also Fowler ad loc.

[34] In *Paradise Regain'd*, Milton treats the flight of the biblical story as a power granted Satan specifically for the occasion: "With that (such power was giv'n him then) he took / The Son of God up to a Mountain high" (3.251–52); "So saying he caught him up, and without wing / Of *Hippogrif* bore through the Air sublime" (4.541–42), setting Christ down on the temple pinnacle.

nagan (RM, n. 16, p. 476) insists that Satan is obviously lying to say the moon has a pleasanter light—how could it if it is merely the reflection of the sun! Warnings like these are plentiful among the commentators: they are a sign of the Satanic poetry's power to make even the best editors lose their good sense.

Satan then calls Eve "Natures desire" and says the stars "joy, with ravishment" at her sight. In her innocence, the dreaming Eve still thinks the voice is Adam's, so good a ventriloquist is Satan.

> I rose as at thy call, but found thee not;
> To find thee I directed then my walk;
> And on, methought, alone I pass'd through ways
> That brought me on a sudden to the Tree
> Of interdicted Knowledge: fair it seem'd,
> Much fairer to my Fancie then by day:
> And as I wondring lookt, beside it stood
> One shap'd and wing'd like one of those from Heav'n.
>
> (PL 5.48–55)

Satan proceeds to anticipate the speech he will later make to Eve's waking self at the Tree when he convinces her to eat. As Eve's dream-narrative continues, Satan praises the Tree but also eats from it himself.

> So saying, he drew nigh, and to me held,
> Even to my mouth of that same fruit held part
> Which he had pluckt; the pleasant savourie smell
> So quick'nd appetite, that I, methought,
> Could not but taste. Forthwith up to the Clouds
> With him I flew, and underneath beheld
> The Earth outstretcht immense, a prospect wide
> And various: wondring at my flight and change
> To this high exaltation; suddenly
> My Guide was gon, and I, me thought, sunk down,
> And fell asleep; but O how glad I wak'd
> To find this but a dream!
>
> (PL 5.82–93)

The syntax of "Could not but taste. Forthwith . . . " manages to suppress the actual eating of the fruit, for this is but a dream, a sign of Eve's interest in the prohibited Tree, perhaps, but not yet the decisive moment itself. She is still innocent here, and the idea of witchcraft is, of course, not made explicit. We may assume that the sudden ending of the dream coincides with the moment when Satan is surprised by the touch of Ithuriel's spear, although the two passages are not related by the narrator.

If the typical account of witchcraft governs the structure and content of this speech at one end of the spectrum, we should not miss the implication, at the

other end, that Satan's voice and his ability to induce a dream in Eve's consciousness align him, and not necessarily ironically, with the voice of God she had heard previously, and with Milton himself as poet: this triple alignment of God-poet-Satan as writers, so to speak, recurs in many forms in the poem, and threatens constantly to subvert any easy hierarchy we may wish to impose. As we have seen, Milton makes his own poetic persona, the narrator of *Paradise Lost*, unmistakably like Satan: they are both Faustian in that they aspire beyond the bounds of what has been done before, they both take courageous flight, and have fallen on dark days. Above all, the epic narrator also has a fully articulated interiority, manifest in the prayer-like invocations that stud the poem, and indeed he hears regularly from his Muse in sleep (9.21–22, 47).

Adam tries afterwards to sort out or interpret the implications of her dream for Eve (and himself), asking "evil whence? in thee can harbour none, / Created pure" (5.99–100),[35] but as it happens, his argument only bears further witness to Satan's problematic place in the workings of the mind, of self-understanding, of subjectivity.

> Evil into the mind of God or Man
> May come and go, so unapprov'd, and leave
> No spot or blame behind: Which gives me hope
> That what in sleep thou didst abhorr to dream,
> Waking thou never wilt consent to do.
>
> (PL 5.117–21)

What Adam knows about the mind of God we may well wonder: some commentators try to get around the question by suggesting he means "angel" here, but then surely the same problem, Adam's lack of familiarity with angels as yet, would apply. As Flannagan says ad loc "speculation whether God can think evil thoughts is tantalizing" (RM, n. 39, p. 479). Hughes cites Thomas Aquinas, "God would not know good things perfectly unless he knew evil things."[36]

In the event, as we know, Adam's hope proves false. Eve is troubled, anxious, perhaps receptive already, as she will later prove, to the tempter's flattery. Something certainly must account for the difference between her demure acceptance of Adam's every word in Book 4 and her rather truculent insistence on having her own way in Book 9. Of course another angelic visit has occurred by then, in which Raphael invites both Adam and Eve to "wingd ascend/ Ethereal, as wee" (5. 498–99), unconsciously echoing Satan. Although hypnotists are said not to be able to make subjects do what they deeply abhor, the suggestions they can sow in the mind are often thought of as irresistible.[37]

[35] For the *unde malum* of Augustine's *Confessions*, 7.5, see chap. 6, below.

[36] Aquinas, *Summa theologica* 1.q.14.a.10.

[37] Empson, *Milton's God*, p. 148. Tillyard argued that Eve is no longer innocent, and the episode was discussed pro– and con– in seminal articles by Millicent Bell, "The Fallacy of the Fall in

In the background of Adam's resistance to this idea is Titus 1.15: "Unto the pure all things are pure; but unto them that are defiled is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled". Small wonder that Adam tries manfully to cheer up his anxious wife, and apparently does, but that nonetheless she "silently a gentle tear let fall / From either eye, and wip'd them with her haire" (5.130–31). And Adam kisses two more tears away "as the gracious signs of sweet remorse/ And pious awe, that feard to have offended" (5.134–35). Fowler and Flannagan (RM, n. 44, p. 479) are reminded ad loc of the repentant sinner, Mary Magdalene, who also wipes away tears with her hair (Luke 7.38), but Fowler then insists that the allusion need not support the view that Eve is already fallen, and Flannagan, too, feels obliged to state that of course Eve has not sinned, or offended. Perhaps so, but Satan has now transferred something of his interiority to Eve, such that she now has the possibility of inner experience that is different from the exterior world, and different from Adam's. She has not sinned, but this is the ominous beginning of their separation. Why else, after being so loving and submissive in Book 4, at their joint wedding song, is she soon to be so eager to go off alone? Or perhaps it is not only the dream and its tantalizing vision of another inner self, but also the whole narrative of Raphael, the part at least about Satan's rebellion and the war—Satan's bid for independence—that induces in her this restlessness.

Paradise Lost," *PMLA* 68 (1953): 863–83, and Wayne Shumaker, "The Fallacy of the Fall in *Paradise Lost*," *PMLA* 70 (1955): 1185–1203. See also Hughes ad loc.

FIVE

SATAN'S REBELLION

Athtar the Rebel went up to the reaches of Zaphon.
He sits enthroned on the throne of Aliyan Baal.
His feet did not reach the footstool,
His head did not reach the top.
And Athtar the Rebel said,
"I will not reign on the reaches of Zaphon".
Athtar the Rebel came down.
He came down from the throne of Aliyan Baal.
And he reigned over the whole of the vast earth.
—*Canaanite Myth*

Paradise Lost establishes first its concern with firsts. "Say first what cause," it urges the Muse, a phrase that invokes its own originals, the classical epics of Homer, Hesiod, and Vergil, which also tell about origins, and ask about initiating causes—for the universe itself in the case of Hesiod. *Paradise Lost* is thus not shy about claiming to be a song of origins—especially and even in its first line about the origin of error, of what went wrong.

In this respect it recalls the ritual practice of certain shamans reported by Mircea Eliade. When someone falls sick, the shaman comes to him and undertakes to sing with him a curing song, a song that sings the origin of the disease from which the patient is suffering. Often the singing of that song will entail singing the rest of the myth of origins, in some form, so that the whole beginning of things is invoked again—to explain the origin of the disease and its place in the scheme, and also, it is hoped, to give the patient power over it, to call up the creative and curative powers that inhere in the story of origins. One of Eliade's examples is from a contemporary Polynesian informant:

> The words by which Io fashioned the Universe—that is to say, by which it was implanted and caused to produce a world of light—the same words are used in the ritual for implanting a child in a barren womb. The words by which Io caused light to shine in the darkness are used in rituals for cheering a gloomy and despondent heart, the feeble aged, the decrepit; for shedding light into secret places and matters, for inspiration in song-composing and in many other affairs, affecting man to despair in times of adverse war. For all such the ritual includes the words (used by Io) to overcome and dispel darkness.[1]

[1] Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 29–31.

Here the cosmogony is the model for every creative or therapeutic situation: a losing battle can be aligned with a sickness, with a discouraged heart, with a woman's infertility, or a poet's depression, and in each case the negative situation can be reversed by recitation of the cosmogonic myth.

Similarly a well-known Assyrian incantation against toothache begins:

> After Anu [had created heaven],
> Heavens had created [the earth],
> The earth had created the rivers,
> The rivers had created the canals,
> The canals had created the marsh,
> The marshes had created the Worm,
> The Worm went weeping before Shamash,
> His tears flowing before Ea:
> "What wilt thou give for my food?"[2]

The God offers it fruit, but the Worm demands human teeth. "Because thou hast said this, O Worm, / May Ea smite thee with the might / Of his hand!" In this brief but wonderful text we discover an early version of the old enemy in his serpentine or worm-like form, and, as Eliade comments, we witness (1) the creation of the world; (2) the birth of the Worm and of the sickness; (3) the primordial and paradigmatic curative act, destruction of the Worm by Ea. The therapeutic efficacy of the incantation lies in the fact that it tells, or reenacts, the origin of the toothache and its treatment in the context of the origin of the world. It enables the sacred time of origins, what Eliade refers to as *illud tempus*, to break in to ordinary time, to be rediscovered. For the "archaic mind" nothing can ever be repaired, it seems; rather what happens is a new beginning, a recreation that echoes and invokes the first creation through a return to sources.

Paradise Lost also sings the origin of the universe in the context of a sickness, but in this case it is all disease that is at stake: "so shall the World goe on, / To good malignant, to bad men benigne, / Under her own waight groaning" (12.537–39). To understand it, to participate in putting it right, we must get back to the original knowledge, the knowledge of origins, to join in the act of renewal that is also recorded, more than once, in the poem—to "quell / The adversarie Serpent, and bring back / Through the worlds wilderness long wanderd man / Safe to eternal Paradise of rest" (12.311–14). It may be detached from any specific ritual, as from any obvious magic, but reading the poem will re-enact the time of origins, the Fall, and the recovery.

Unfortunately, this somewhat romantic view of the poem, like the approach to myth on which it rests, has apparently been taken from us by recent literary theory. We now know all about the impossibility of recovering origins,

[2] J. B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), p. 100.

whether generally from Derrida's critique of Rousseau's quest for the origin of language, in *Of Grammatology*, or more specifically from Regina Schwartz's demonstration that nothing in Milton is ever said for the first time. She showed how many beginnings *Paradise Lost* has, and argued that he shows an awareness of that Derridean impossibility, that the pointing and invoking power of the sign always contains the knowledge that the world it evokes is gone. Paradise is indeed lost, and its recovery always just out of reach.[3]

Here I want to argue that the power of *Paradise Lost* lies rather in the tension it requires us to experience between these two views, which both need to be held at the same time. On the one hand lies the romantic or Eliadic (in this case specifically the Christian) possibility of renewal, and on the other the more depressing sense that what has happened has happened once and for all. Like Conrad's Lord Jim or Razumov, or Milton's Adam, we long at times to get back to "before it happened," but we nonetheless live on through our present time. *Paradise Lost*, to the degree that it is incantation, and to the degree that it offers a special knowledge, holds out to us that magical return to the beginning, yet as a measured and reflective epic poem must, it holds us off and refuses the escape from the time of reading.

Milton's was always at the very least more complicated than the Eliadic vision. Milton's explicit myth of origins, Raphael's song, is embedded in another discourse, and makes its own status explicitly problematic: "how shall I relate," he asks, "To human sense th' invisible exploits / Of warring Spirits" and even suggests it may not be lawful to do so, despite his God-given mission. He also poses a characteristically open-ended Miltonic question: "what if," he says, "Earth / Be but the shaddow of Heav'n, and things therein / Each to other like, more then on earth is thought?" (5.564–76) So are they more like, or aren't they? We are never told.[4] And the time of the narrative is equally complex. Raphael's discourse is a warning about the future although it is mainly retrospective: we are invited to see the parallels between past and future even though in the event they are quite different. Times and tenses, as often in Milton, are deliberately muddled, as if to require the reader to abandon a simple linear concept of time, or rather to allow another kind of time into consciousness. We must renounce the simple idea of myth as first history in order to recover it as recurrent but always mysterious source of meaning.

I want to exemplify this two-sidedness of Milton's non-origin song by

[3] Regina Schwartz, *Remembering and Repeating: Biblical Creation in* Paradise Lost (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[4] Karen Edwards, *Milton and the Natural World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), persuasively argues for Raphael's presentation of the Creation and the cosmos as antiauthoritarian, "open-ended and richly indeterminate," such that critics have wondered whether the Copernican or Ptolemaic systems were correct. It is structurally unresolvable, designed *not* to meet Adam's demand for a 'solution' to 'resolve' his doubtful reading. . . Raphael commends the process of poring over God's book; he declines to halt the process by providing a solution" (p. 66). McMahon, *Two Poets*, p. 9, questions Raphael's reliability, as have others.

reading the opening of the angelic rebellion episode. This is the earliest chronological event of the poem, the origin, or at least the first cause we are given, of what went wrong. It is, I shall argue, very difficult to sort out what happens when, especially if we read in the light of its explicit or implicit subtexts. Much more is now known about the apocryphal or noncanonical origins of these myths, but our further knowledge only increases our sense of Milton's originality. No recently recovered version is much like Milton's: he took on the Judeo-Christian plot at its weakest, least-established point, and in so doing offered a radical and extremely uncomfortable reading of what was wrong in the world. In spite of what the doctrine of the poem says, it is unquestionably God as much as Satan who is the "villain." How we are to take this is an open matter. But there is no moment when Satan is not, no moment that is Satan-free and that can therefore be taken simply and singly, free from the doubleness or duality that Satan brings with him.[5]

Another way to put this, less Empsonian, would be to recall Skeat's sketch for the etymology of the Germanic word *sin*, in which he showed its kinship with the Latin *sons*, and so with Greek *eson* and Latin *sunt*, thus with the very idea of "being" itself. "To be," then, equals "to be sinful." We can fully experience this paradox, however, only by constructing a chimaera, an imaginary world in which "to be" and "to be sinful" are different, in which paradise is not lost, and "God" is not equally implicated in the sinfulness. Skeat made his exhilarating discovery by exploring the history of the word, its etymology.[6] I want to use a similar method. I hope to show that by excavating the source-texts for Milton's rebellion episode, we shall find the same paradoxes, the same doubleness: each of the texts we uncover will be shown to contain its own opposite, a text that it contradicts and points back beyond itself. Milton's narrative about origins provokes us to explore these origins for ourselves, and so to repeat as scholars the experience offered by the poem—a shamanic quest for curative origins, like the waters, or the wood, of Paradise, tempered by the sober sense that what we find will not be what we sought.

1. *Rebellion in Hesiod*

Rebellion among the gods is a narrative paradigm that comes down from antiquity in various forms. Hesiod's *Theogony* has been especially influential,

[5] Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), says that "there can be no more irreducible beginning" than Satan (p. 60). For Harold Bloom, though, this is a flaw, since whereas Shakespeare dramatizes the process that leads Iago to his acts, Milton does not allow us to see back past Satan to the Lucifer he once was. But it is precisely the function of an origin myth, though not of a tragedy, to arrest the potentially endless regression at a necessarily arbitrary point. In any case we do get a strong sense in Book 5 of what brings Satan into being (*Western Canon*, pp. 176–77).

[6] Walter W. Skeat, *Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, [1879–82, 1910]), reprinted 1974), p. 563; see chap. 6.8, below.

and Milton makes various uses of Hesiod. He adapts and demotes Hesiod's originating "*Chaos* wilde," and has him reign previous to "these Heav'ns" (5.577–78);[7] the angels who sing around God's throne allude to the Muses whom Hesiod praises as singers near the beginning of the *Theogony*; and Milton's stress on the loving gifts of power and praise between God and his Son needs to be seen against the background of the violent and destructive father-son exchanges in Hesiod. Prophecy about the future power of the two main son-figures, Zeus and Heracles, is also what initiates the sequences of war and reconciliation. Above all, Milton noticed the ambivalence of the *Theogony* and used it for his own undecidable rebellion in Heaven.[8] For the *Theogony* is a special variant of the rebellion paradigm designed to protect its hero Zeus from the implication that it was he who rebelled against the established order of the older gods. Logic requires the younger gods to rebel against the older, but Hesiod muddies his main tale to make it seem as if the older gods, the Titans, are in fact the rebels. It is this two-sidedness of rebellion narratives that allows for the richness of suggestion we find in Milton's variant, and keeps its precise meanings just out of reach.[9]

Milton was a good reader of Hesiod, as of the other pre-texts I am going to cite: in fact, he often fixed on texts that are especially problematic, texts that contradict each other or that contain hidden myths or subtexts held but repressed within them. He delights in unearthing contradictions, since he has little time for orthodoxy, which papers them over. In Hesiod the repressed myth is Zeus as rebel. In Milton, well . . . the same narrative, give or take some complex theology and careful reading of the Bible, which is what we should expect when "God" replaces Zeus.

2. *God's Creative Word*

Milton gives the first move in the narrative sequence to God, or rather to an imperial summons on a special day as the Great Year rolls round again. This Platonic Great Year, 36,000 solar years, provides a kind of background of re-

[7] But compare 10.477, where Satan refers to "unoriginal *Night* and *Chaos* wilde," an odd usage explained in the *OED* (where it is the only instance) and in Hughes and Fowler ad loc as meaning "having no origin," that nothing existed before to originate it (i.e., Night). Is that what the phrase means to you? Flannagan (RM, n. 178, p. 638) is clearer but simply removes the problem: "Night . . . did not exist before God created it: thus Satan is unconsciously admitting God's creation, having publicly denied it"—but this begs the whole question.

[8] On Miltonic uses of Hesiod, see Philip Gallagher, "*Paradise Lost* and the Greek Theogony," *English Literary Renaissance* 9 (1979): 121–48, but neither Hesiod's nor Milton's are Satanic epics, I think, in quite the orthodox way Gallagher argued. Pagan gods were indeed seen as devils by the early Church, but the identification was never obligatory.

[9] See Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, pp. 76–89, 124–46. I there show how various myths follow similar rebellion paradigms, from the *Enuma Eliš*, through the Athtar, Phaethon, and Lucifer myths, to Apocalyptic contexts, especially the Semihazah-Asael variants that appear in the *Enoch* tradition.

curring time against which the special once-and-for-all events of the poem are enacted.[10] The events of Satan's rebellion, which now takes place, thus happen at a moment that is a repetition of endless previous great years, and so can claim only a limited kind of primacy. At any rate the "inhabitants with god," ten-thousand thousand angels all with heraldic emblems, are called together to hear God's solemn decree anointing Christ—yet this decree is presented as deliberately arbitrary, and as if God knows there is likely to be trouble: he says that he has "begotten" his Son in time, in fact this very day, and commands all to worship him: the tone of this announcement, especially if one reads it aloud with emphasis, makes it sound as if Satan has a legitimate complaint.

> Hear all ye Angels, Progenie of Light,
> Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Vertues, Powers,
> Hear my Decree, which unrevok't shall stand.
> This day I have begot whom I declare
> My onely Son, and on this holy Hill
> Him have anointed, whom ye now behold
> At my right hand; your Head I him appoint;
> And by my Self have sworn to him shall bow
> All knees in Heav'n, and shall confess him Lord:
> Under his great Vice-gerent Reign abide
> United as one individual Soule
> For ever happie: him who disobeyes
> Mee disobeyes, breaks union, and that day
> Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls
> Into utter darkness, deep ingulft, his place
> Ordaind without redemption, without end.
>
> (PL 5.600–615)

All that before anyone has a chance to respond, but I suppose we can say that Satan has been warned. Understandably his reaction to this speech is that he

[10] Fowler ad loc shows how Milton "navigates around the Platonic doctrine that time, a moveable image of eternity, is generated by the heavenly bodies" (*Timaeus* 37e–38e), and invokes Plato's "great year" of 36,000 years, implying that the cycle of deterioration begins now, leading to the loss of the Golden Age. But this is the earliest chronological event in the poem, and so it is strange for quasi-military "Standards, and Gonfalons" (5.589) to stream in the air; even if these are understood as purely ecclesiastical emblems, it is odd that they "bear imblaz'd / Holy Memorials, acts of Zeale and Love / Recorded eminent" (5.592–94). These lines cannot but recall the famous words of Vergil's *Eclogue* 4.5, "magnus ab integro saeclorum nascitur ordo," where the notion of the "great year," as well as Sybilline prophecies, is also present. Shelley rewrites the lines for the final chorus of his drama *Hellas*, "The world's great age begins anew, / The golden years return." Milton is unusual in making this idea the occasion of the cosmic fall. In Allan H. Gilbert's view, Milton's was the only version of the story that located the origin of the conflict at this point; see his "The Theological Basis of Satan's Rebellion and the Function of Abdiel in *Paradise Lost*," *Modern Philology* 40 (1942): 20–39.

"thought himself impaird" (5.665), a revealing and important pun: etymologically it means simply "made worse," from Latin *peior*, but the play with "pair" suggests what Satan complains: that he is no longer on a par with the Son, had perhaps imagined himself a Son, too.[11] Indeed in some forms of the story, where we can see the influence of the Cain and Abel or Esau and Jacob pairs, Son and Satan are brothers.[12]

In commenting on this passage, Alastair Fowler makes one of his more engagingly outrageous claims, in the true style of the British academic, sure of his subject and of his grounds, determined by the application of superior scholarship to put an end to all this nonsense once and for all. Here is what he says: "These lines are among the most controversial in the poem, and quite unnecessarily so." He then cites the two principal allusions, to Psalm 2.6–7 and to Hebrews 1.5, both discussed by Milton in *De doctrina Christiana*. As Fowler's note goes on it accumulates qualifiers like "by implication" and "presumably" that gradually belie its confidence. He first belittles Empson's discovery of a contradiction with line 832 ("But grant it thee unjust that equal over equal monarch reign"), dismisses the difficulty raised by Maurice Kelley (that these events took place much earlier in time), but then suddenly finds he has to agree with Empson that the passage is shocking. The hesitation waltz that Fowler performs here, far from being odd or unusual, is similar to what most commentators do with the text if they bother to get involved at all, and it is, I think, the kind of response that the text requires.[13] I shall show that the two biblical passages cited are far from ending the matter, as Fowler hoped, once we trace them out, and also that the confusion evident here is a necessary consequence of Milton's choice of originating event; indeed, it may well be the reason for that choice. Hesiod had tried to conceal, or perhaps pretended to conceal, the incriminating story about Zeus as rebel. Milton fixed on a similar situation in his biblical sources, where a similar surface narrative holds an incriminating secret within it—and so proved a better reader of the originating texts than have been some of his critics.

Before we turn to the sources, let us notice how many problems there are with God's speech, and how Milton seems to stress them. The speech has all the earmarks of an originary or foundation speech, and yet the angels who gather to hear it have "Memorials" on their flags of "acts of Zeale and Love / Recorded eminent" (5.593–94)—so there is already a kind of emblematic

[11] Milton is careful not to specify Satan's rank, but at 6.690 he and Michael are described as "Equal in their Creation." For angels as Sons of God, see below. For the pun, see R. A. Shoaf, *Milton, Poet of Duality* p. 16.

[12] For example, Lactantius 2.8.7; see J. B. Russell, *Satan*, pp. 149–59, for the Bogomils, an elaborate version of the brothers narrative, and idem, *Lucifer*, pp. 43–49, 185–90, and chap. 1, section 9 above.

[13] Fowler unfortunately eliminated most of his argument for the second edition (1998), a much drier though still encyclopedically informative text.

history and a settled order in heaven. Milton in fact attacked the common notion of time as beginning with the world we know,[14] and he introduces this highly abstract metaphysical issue here with a virtually unreadable gloss of his own (the parentheses are Milton's): "(For Time, though in Eternitie, appli'd / To motion, measures all things durable / By present, past, and future)" (5.580–82). This gobbledygook is there to account for the narrator's use of the word "day," a word that does indeed recur several times now in various forms: "a day," "such a day," "this day," "that day." This is, we are told helpfully, "such day / As Heav'ns great Year brings forth," which explains how it is that God, who knows no days, himself can use the word "day" in his speech, as he must if he is to quote the biblical passages accurately.

All this pseudo-science comes very close to saying "once upon a time." Indeed arguably that is the narrative "slot," the traditional language of beginnings, that is here filled—to follow the conventional Proppian analysis of folktale—though it is dressed up with high classical speculation. And we might well quibble, or the Satanic reader might protest, that what God says isn't even as true as fairy-tale predictions: "that day / Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls / Into utter darkness," he says (5.612–14), but the narrative soon shows this day takes three "days" of war before Satan falls. Biblical commentators had long had to grapple with the problem of God's prediction that "on the day ye eat thereof ye shall surely die," since neither Adam nor Eve actually dies on the same day they eat. Milton faced this issue by distinguishing different degrees of death, and by making God elaborate a little when he first makes the prohibition: "The day thou eat'st thereof, my sole command / Transgrest, inevitably thou shalt dye; / From that day mortal, and this happie State / Shalt loose" (8.329–32).[15] But he offers the angels no such explanation of the parallel and equally unfixable usage in Book 5.

The speech is very succinct. Indeed it packs into one line around a powerful caesura the whole duality of history, and even contradicts itself: "For ever happie: him who disobeyes" (5.611). The problem is there: at the very moment the Son is said to be begotten in order to make everyone happy forever, God's word also calls Satan into being, not as Lucifer, his earlier name, but as the rebel, the disobedient one. Poor Satan, on this view, may seem to do nothing but respond to God's call, to walk into the trap opened for him here. He steps up to fill the conspicuously absent seat at the left (or sinister) hand of God.[16] Like action and reaction, God's word creates or begets both Son and

[14] *De doctrina Christiana* 1.7 (YP 6.313–14).

[15] For Milton's elegant solution, "A long days dying" (10.964), see chap. 10, below.

[16] Compare Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 2.8.6.2: "[Deus] fecitque ante omnia duos fontes rerum sibi adversarium inter seque pugnantium, illos scilicet duos spiritus, rectum atque pravum, quorum alter est deo tamquam dextra, alter tamquam sinistra." On the "sinister" implications of Satan's pairing with the Son, see J. B. Russell, *Satan*, pp. 149–59. The Bible has many references

Satan at the same moment, as "two twins cleaving together, leaping forth into the world." Obviously, then, the language as well as the tone of God's speech is acutely troubling. Days are not days, eternal happiness includes or provokes disobedience, the aspirating alliteration of "holy Hill / Him Have" is quickly reduced to the single "Head", from which "Heav'n" is too far to resonate, and the profoundly resonant word "anoint" (Christ, Messiah) is instantly reduced by the rhyme with the merely political "appoint."

In spite of the later pronouncements by Michael during the war that Satan himself is the "Author of evil, unknown till thy revolt" (6.262), a careful reading of the above passage suggests that God's creative word has called him into being at the same moment as he announces the elevation of the Son. God's speech is what linguists call "phatic," a performative utterance. "In the beginning was the Word." Strictly speaking, perhaps, Satan and his cohorts are "self-tempted, self-deprav'd," in the sense that they are free not to react in this way, yet we would have to imagine a defective speech of God if what it here predicts did not happen.[17]

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to the seat at the right hand of God, none to the left. But Christ, or the Son of man, does have a left hand. In Matthew 25.31–46, the sheep go to the right and the goats to the left. To these he says "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat . . . " This is the biblical basis for the association of the Devil with the left hand (and goats), and the scene is repeated in countless representations of the Last Judgment. The Latin word *sinister* connects "left" and "evil" via augury. The relation of "left" and "north" is widespread. Walter Skeat connects "north" with Umbrian *nertru*, "on the left," *Etymological Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, [1879] 1974). The link of the North with enemies and with the Devil is biblical: e.g., Isa. 14.13, Job 26.6–7, Jer. 1.14–15, Hab. 1.5–11, see Brevard S. Childs, "The Enemy from the North and the Chaos Tradition," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 78 (1959): 187–98. On the Christian symbolism, see D. M. Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973) and Susan Snyder, "The Left Hand of God: Despair in Medieval and Renaissance Tradition," *Studies in the Renaissance* 12 (1965): 18–59. S. Shahar, "Le Catharisme et le début de la cabale," *Annales* 29 (1974): pp. 1185–1210, shows the links of the left, the North, and evil in the Kabbalah. Left-handed people were well aware of the traditional suppression of one term in a pair before deconstruction made the idea fashionable. An Islamic *hadith* enjoins the faithful not to touch food nor to drink with the left hand, which is Satan's. The practical reasons for this, well known to those who have traveled in India, are explored in Rodney Needham, ed., *Right and Left* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973).

[17] Theologians and Miltonists, even Milton's God, spend some energy denying that his prediction actually causes something to happen: "they themselves decreed / Thir own revolt, not I; if I foreknew, / Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault" (3.116–18). For the theology, see Georgia Christopher, *Milton and the Science of the Saints* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 92–115, but see also Empson, *Milton's God*, pp. 81–89, 95–97. Burden quotes a baffled Hume, *Logical Epic*, pp. 21–22: "To reconcile the indifference and contingency of human action with prescience, or to defend absolute decrees, and yet free the Deity from being the author of sin, has been found hitherto to exceed all the powers of philosophy" (*Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, sec. 8, pt. 2).

3. *Satan's Theology*

The main theological problem, though, is with the word "begot." God does not stop to explain here what Milton was at pains to argue in *De doctrina Christiana*, and as the pro-God critics have insisted, that the word is to be taken as metaphorical rather than literal, and so means "exalted" or "honored," not "begotten." (If it is taken literally, then "it means that the Son was created after the angels.")[18] Satan could legitimately complain that God might have made himself a bit clearer at such an important moment in the history of the universe. Satan, after all, did not have the benefit of Fowler's notes. He is soon using the word literally, when he claims to be "self-begot" (like the Gnostic Demiurge) as he and Abdiel argue about the doctrine of "who made whom," or "who came first." Of course one can dismiss this as yet another Satanic misunderstanding, but what is it that he has misunderstood? What would it feel like to understand this point?[19] Literally, after all, "beget" is the male side of the procreative act, "conceive" the female, but no females get into the narrative at this point (though Sin is just about to be born—or is it begotten?—from Satan's head). Should we understand the word as metaphorically transforming an all-male creation myth?

In any case the problem of origins and authentication is here acute, a matter for rival claims that do not depend on external authority. Edmund Leach showed that this is how myth is used in practical politics: two rival clans dispute their claims to power by arguing different versions of the emergence myth: who came out first?[20] And the argument in *Paradise Lost* is never resolved. As Adam shows later, we must take it all on trust, since "who himself beginning knew?" (8.251). This is the first (chronologically) of many significant ambiguities (undecidables) in the poem, and a typical sign of how difficult Milton makes his God. The sudden decision to change the power structure in Heaven is quite simply inexplicable.[21] Satan, we may well feel, deserves our sympathy.

[18] C. S. Lewis, *Preface*, p. 84.

[19] Empson makes much of this question, thinking Satan fully justified; see *Milton's God*, pp. 60–61.

[20] Edmund Leach "Myth as a Justification for Faction and Social Change," in *Political Systems of Highland Burma* (London: Athlone Press, 1954), especially pp. 266–67, on the origin of the spirit of jealousy in the rivalry between two brothers, the elder favored in one account, the younger in another. Lactantius, in the passage cited in nn. 11 and 15 of this chapter, above, says that God loves one spirit or principle "like a good son, rejects the other like a bad," reproducing Cain and Abel at the angelic level.

[21] "In the publishing of humane lawes, which for the most part aime not beyond the good of civill society, to set them barely forth to the people without reason or Preface, like a physicall prescript, or only with threatnings, as it were a lordly command, in the judgment of Plato was thought to be done neither generously nor wisely" (the opening sentence of *The Reason of Church Government* [YP 1.746]). Stella Revard, *War in Heaven*, pp. 57–59, is the most articulate of many critics who try to salvage God from his speech: she suggests that, "had Satan listened to it carefully

For help with God's difficult language, we may turn to one of the best of the commentators, Georgia Christopher. She points to one of the key themes, here and in the Luther and Calvin she read so diligently, the emphasis on Grace through hearing the divine words, through epiphanies, as God indeed commands: "Hear, all ye angels."[22] Yet the poem contains various interpreters of these words, including not only Satan, Beelzebub, and Abdiel, but God himself: he confirms later to Abdiel that the Son reigns by merit (6.44), something he did not say before to all the assembled angels, but perhaps should have. He had said it before in Book 3.309, ("By Merit more then Birthright Son of God")—but of course that is afterwards, when the Son has actually done something (offered himself as a sacrifice for man). Milton's nonchronological plot structure thus adds to the complexity and increases the validity of Satan's complaint.[23]

Georgia Christopher is also helpful in citing Calvin in connection with the problem posed by God's initiating speech, and she puts it very simply: God does not cause evil even if nothing happens without his will. She calls this a dark paradox, dark indeed, and a deliberate offense to reason (92), rather like a Zen koan that stays in the mind as a problem or paradox, unresolvable but troubling. We also have to set it against God's claim to do so, quoted into the

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and without the blinding fury of his pride," this speech might have been the means to stay his revolt. "Had Satan understood God's words to the angels as a paternal warning of the dangers of alienation and a loving plea to seek the blessings of union through the Son, he would neither have resented the Son's function as king nor have resolved upon the separation from God that effects his damnation." She also insists, as she must on this view, that "God foretells that Satan will close his eyes to blessed vision," but that he "does not urge Satan into disobedience; like the God of the Nicene fathers he cannot urge evil in a good creature."

[22] Christopher, *Science*, pp. 90–119.

[23] William B. Hunter, Jr., "Milton on the Exaltation of the Son," in *Bright Essence*, pp. 115–130, makes Milton be simultaneously narrating three events from three different points in time, but when he tries to explain he gets the order muddled:

1. The surface narrative (as he calls it) of the fall of angels, before the foundation of the world;
2. the defeat of Satan and devils at the end of time told in Revelations;
3. (most important) the exaltation that took place concomitantly with Christ's resurrection as incarnate God-man.

Though I think that, in the structure of Christian mythology, these three events are indeed three variations on the same Proppian functions, they are not to be confused with, or collapsed into, each other. Thus, the incarnation, death, and humiliation sit rather uncomfortably, as Hunter is honest enough to acknowledge, alongside the war and victorious triumph of Book 6. He pretends that the silence about Christ during the Michael battle is because he's supposed to be in Hell, or in the grave. On the third day, the Son at dawn ascends his chariot and is exalted as victor, returning to sit at the Father's right hand again. Richard S. Ide, "On the Begetting of the Son in *Paradise Lost*", *Studies in English Literature 24* (1984): 141–55, sorts out much of the confusion in the three overlapping episodes by insisting only on the three triumphs over Satan, which for him are the War in Heaven, the Resurrection, the Apocalypse or end-time battle. Stella Revard, *War in Heaven*, pp. 73–78, argues refreshingly that the begetting is entirely a heavenly matter.

poem at 2.622–23 from Isaiah 45.7, "I form light and I create darkness; I produce good and I create evil."[24]

She is most useful of all recalling that the reformers (chiefly Luther and Calvin) insisted on the power of God's creative Word. What God says happens—the saying even makes it happen (102). Empson was right, she says, but failed to understand that in Milton's tradition, God's words were assumed to be pugnacious and combative.[25] Luther shows God provoking a fight, citing Romans 7.14ff and Galatians 5.16ff: "As soon as the Word of God appears, the devil becomes angry," and she compares Calvin's "Nor is it at all wonderful, or unusual, if the world begins to rage as soon as a throne is erected for Christ," so that the War in Heaven validates and expands this text. Crisis, thus, is an inherent property of God's words; he is no Platonic deity. Yet in the cases cited by Calvin and Christopher, we might reply, the world is already a fallen world, whereas Milton makes God's speech take place before the Fall, indeed makes it the moment of origin itself. One way out of the dilemma, she proposes, is to say that God's wrath is a human affliction (115), that we perceive not God as he is but God as the sinner perceives him, which I would grant is a neat sleight of theology, but displaces rather than solves the problem, in particular the problem of the word "begot."

Dogmatically, the problem with God's speech used to turn around the question of Milton's supposed Arianism, or what more cautiously some have labelled Subordinationism, the subordination of the Son to the Father.[26] That the issue deeply worried Milton is clear: the longest chapter in *De doctrina Christiana* concerns the status and nature of the Son, where he goes back and forth between various solutions. In both epic poems, Milton makes the identity of the Son problematic at the critical moments. Indeed both epics turn on the question of the Son's identity. In *Paradise Regain'd*, Satan and the others also hear God's voice proclaiming his Son's special status (1.31–32, 84–85), and once again it is the moment that motivates the action. Recall that exasperated,

[24] For further discussion, see chap. 6, below, and the Introduction, above.

[25] Christopher, *Science*, p. 109. I think this is unfair to Empson. He understood very well what this tradition was like—and he was appalled by it; for his argument that God provokes Satan's rebellion, see Empson, *Milton's God*, pp. 81–89, 95–97.

[26] I follow the persuasive and meticulous arguments of Michael Bauman, *Milton's Arianism* (Frankfurt, Berne, and New York: Peter Lang, 1987), pp. 202–318, and John Rumrich, "Milton's Arianism: Why It Matters," in Dobranski and Rumrich, *Milton and Heresy*, pp. 80–83, in thinking that there is no need to recuperate Milton for orthodoxy by calling him a "subordinationist" (as I did, pusillanimously, in an earlier version of this chapter) rather than an Arian. The orthodox Lewis, *Preface*, pp. 84–85, is as clear as usual, quoting the key Arian passage from the opening of *De doctrina Christiana*, chap. 5, "On the Son," that all the biblical passages Milton collects "prove the existence of the Son before the world was made, but they conclude nothing respecting His generation from all eternity". Richard Ide shows the contradictions that Milton gets himself into (on whether there was a literal and a metaphorical begetting) in "On The Begetting of the Son," pp. 144–46. The relevant passages are in *De doctrina Christiana* 1.5.51–52, 85 (YP 6:205–210, 261).

even moving speech of Satan's about the parallel scene of baptism at the Jordan:

> I among the rest
> Though not to be Baptiz'd, by voice from Heav'n
> Heard thee pronounc'd the Son of God belov'd.
> Thenceforth I thought thee worth my nearer view
> And narrower Scrutiny, that I might learn
> In what degree or meaning thou art call'd
> The Son of God, which bears no single sence.
> The Son of God I also am, or was,
> And if I was, I am; relation stands;
> All men are Sons of God; yet thee I thought
> In some respect far higher so declar'd.
>
> (*Paradise Regain'd* 4.511–21)

"All men are Sons of God"!—in some sense. But in what sense? We may also remember now the traditions that made Satan, too, a son of God, and imagine him choking with that memory as he says, "The Son of God I also am, or was," and then quickly continuing with a philosophical pronouncement, "And if I was, I am; relation stands." Satan is indeed quite right to say that the phrase "Son of God" bears no single sense.

In *Paradise Lost* the issue is equally difficult, pace Fowler. There are several allusions to or citations of biblical texts, not quite agreeing with each other, arranged in the poem in various places: for example, in Book 8 (405–7), God says playfully that he is "alone / From all Eternitie, for none I know / Second to me or like, equal much less," yet in Book 3 (305–7) God had himself told the Son he was "Equal to God"—and no doubt all of us would have to think for a moment before sorting out which pronouncement comes first in time. Arthur Sewell had concluded from this contradiction that "Milton's views were developing as the poem was being written," but C. A. Patrides realized that, "were we to accept this, the unified artistic conception that is *Paradise Lost* [would] be shattered into a series of fragments."[27] That conclusion is pretty strong, and shows the anxiety evoked by a threat to artistic unity, one of the critical shibboleths of the time Patrides and his fellow contributors to *Bright Essence* were writing, the early 1960s.

Patrides in fact went on to argue for a way to preserve unity (the Son *is* God except at moments within Heaven where the two are separate, for purposes of the dialogue). It was an ingenious and obvious solution, perhaps the best to come out of that long debate, but it entirely ignored what I take now to be fairly obvious, that Milton did not simply construct a unified epic for us

[27] Hunter, Patrides, and Adamson, *Bright Essence*, pp. 63–70.

all to admire, but rather provided the occasion for us (and himself) to put it all together again. We do so in dialogue with his text, and in collusion, at various times, with those various voices and ears, including Satan's, but also Raphael's and Adam's, who hear the words of God, whether directly or reported, and have to make something of them. Thus he allows for, even encourages, Empson's delighted comment on the Book 3 passage just cited, that it is "the best moment of God in the poem . . . because he is envisaging his abdication" (137): having already been enthroned once (the scene in Book 5), the Son must now be being promised God's own throne. Perhaps so. Everyone notices, however, that the structural order of the poem reverses the chronological in this respect, which makes it even more difficult either to separate or to properly relate these two enthronements. This complex narrative is far from the simplicity of a ritual incantation, but it does not merely dismiss the possibility of finding out how it all came to pass.

4. *Sources of Satan's Motive*

The sources of this episode probably lie in a myth that was widespread at the time of Christ, and is itself a reflex of the ancient Near Eastern rebellion myth that we find in Isaiah 14 or Ezekiel 28. Arnold Williams showed that in some medieval and several Reformation versions of the story of Satan's rebellion, the motivating incident is that Satan objected to the plan of Christ to become incarnate in human rather than angelic form. This posed problems because of the time sequence, as Calvin pointed out: "How could he foresee that which should not have come to pass, if man had not sinned?",[28] which is after all the reason for Christ's decision to become man. Consequently, Williams argued, Milton substituted the exaltation for the incarnation. In his brilliant book *Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition*, J. Martin Evans made the excellent argument that the main narrative source of this episode is not exactly Satan's objection to Christ's projected incarnation, but rather his refusal to worship the newly created Adam, such as we find it in the tradition represented by the Latin *Vita Adae et Evae*. Indeed the story about Satan's jealousy of Adam, though it is not in any canonical text, was widely known throughout the Middle Ages.

This story, however, gives Satan a far too plausible motivation, since he was indeed senior to Adam and God was violating the established hierarchy by ordering the angels to worship a mere man—a motivation that Satan retains in Milton. And this story, like the one proposed by Williams, still upset the chronology, since Adam's creation (and that of the rest of mankind) tended more and more to be placed after, not before, the fall of Satan, and in Milton

[28] J. Martin Evans, *Genesis Tradition*, p. 225.

is intended to fill the gap left by the fall of the angels out of heaven. Milton's substitution of the Son for Adam solved this problem, and was made easier by the Pauline identification of Christ as the second Adam.[29] If Evans's argument is right, and he is persuasive, then we have a further reason for the confusion about "begot." Adam was literally created (not perhaps "begotten" strictly speaking, but let us not argue whether God has sexual abilities or not) on the day in question, "this day," but once we apply the story to the Son, the word has to be taken metaphorically, and the difficulties begin to multiply.

In view of what we know now about the sources of the episode in apocryphal tradition, Milton's decision shows a keen sense of how close are orthodoxy and heresy, how they feed and construct each other in their competing efforts to account for the origins of things. The apocryphal Latin *Vita Adae et Evae* is an extremely problematic book, and as scholarship extends the range within which we must try to understand it, it becomes harder and harder to say just what it is, or what the story it tells means. It is merely one of many related texts (in various languages) which must have originated in the first century/centuries B.C.E., in the context of sectarian Judaism and in particular redemption theology. The story of Adam and Eve was then displacing the story of the Watcher angels, developed in the *Book of Enoch* tradition and based on the story of those other "Sons of God" in Genesis 6.1–4, as the accepted account of the origin of evil.[30] The Latin version, which shows considerable Christianizing, cannot be dated much before the fourth century C.E.—among others reasons, it prophesies Christ's descent into Hell and the baptism of Adam, together with Seth's return to Paradise to fetch a twig that is to become the wood of the cross, stories based on the "Descensus ad Inferos," Christ's Harrowing of Hell. A Greek version, known mistakenly as *The Apocalypse of Moses*, is not yet Christianized, and probably goes back to the first century C.E., but it does not contain the main story we are interested in here, the fall of the Devil. But the Armenian version, known as *The Penitence of Adam*, which Michael Stone takes to be more primitive in some respects than the Greek and Latin versions,[31] does contain a variant of the story, as does the Georgian

[29] The refusal to worship Adam is the story that the Qu'ran uses to explain the hostility of Satan/Iblis. And, indeed, the popularity of this story in the Middle Ages may well have been influenced by its repeated use in the Qur'an. See especially Sura 7.11–24 (Al Araf). It is a splendid irony that the greatest of those Christian poems that attempt to account for the origin of the adversary, Satan and evil, and to justify the ways of God to men, should have chosen as its originating narrative one that, mutatis mutandis, plays the same role in Islam, the great Other and adversary of Christianity since the seventh century. A crude translation of the Qur'an had been made in 1649 out of French, by Alexander Ross, which Milton may conceivably have seen.

[30] Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, pp. 222, 389.

[31] Michael Stone, *A History of the Literature of Adam and Eve* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), p. 69.

version.[32] Stone may be too modest to say so, but his work makes it virtually certain that this version of Satan's rebellion is pre-Christian.

Several other apocryphal texts, recently re-edited or brought together from surviving fragments, also retell this story. One, *The Questions of Bartholemew*, picks up and Christianizes the Jewish story. Another, *The Apocalypse of Adam*, one of the Nag Hammadi texts, is Gnostic in its language and tone, and may indicate that the *Vita* story of Satan's jealousy is a reply, or an effort to reclaim this origin story more for an Orthodox Jewish than Christian context.[33] A third, the *Apocalypse of Shedrach* also tells the story, and includes the following accusation by Shedrach against God:

> In fact it was thy will, o Lord, that Adam was deceived. You were the one who ordered your angels to prostrate themselves before Adam, but the first of the angels refused to obey your order and did not prostrate himself before him, and you exiled him. Why was your order transgressed, and why did he not come forward to the work you had made with your hands? If you loved man, why did you not kill the devil, the artisan of injustice? For he penetrates like smoke into the heart of men and shows them all sins. He wages war against immortal god. But poor man, what can he do against him?[34]

This work is probably Christian in origin, but though the fine image of the devil as smoke looks new, the story here told presupposes the longer form of the rebellion narrative, originally Jewish, that we find in the *Vita* and *The Questions of Bartholemew*. The version told in the long (and probably later) form of the *Book of the Secrets of Enoch* also presupposes it.[35] So widespread a myth, though it survives only in Christianized circles in this form, clearly predates Christianity, and in all likelihood, like other apocryphal myths, will have been known to the authors of the Christian Scriptures. It would thus be a kind of antetext, one both cryptically acknowledged and repressed, within what came to be the Christian New Testament. Among all the various kinds of apocrypha, this is the most threatening to canonized orthodoxies, and the most interesting.

[32] Gary A. Anderson and Michael E. Stone, eds., *A Synopsis of the Books of Adam and Eve* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), pp. 10–13.

[33] Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, p. 241.

[34] *Apocalypse of Shedrach* 5.1–6, in Jean-Daniel Kaestli and Piere Cherix, *L'évangile de Barthélemy*. (Liège: Brepols, 1993), p. 89.

[35] For the argument that the long form of the *Book of the Secrets of Enoch* is a late work, see André Vaillant, *Le livre des secrets d'Hénoch* (Paris: Institut d'Etudes Slaves, 1952), pp. 93–103, and H. A. Kelly, *The Devil at Baptism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 18n. See contra Rainer Stichel, "Die Verführung der Stammeltern durch Satanael nach der Kurzfassung der slavischen Baruch-Apokalypse," in *Kulturelle Traditionen in Bulgarien*, eds. Reinhard Lauer and Peter Schreiner (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989).

5. *Hebrews*

This is an especially interesting possibility if we look up the Hebrews passage so confidently adduced by Fowler to silence controversy over Milton's God. For just that, it turns out, is also what the Epistle to the Hebrews does—attempt to silence controversy. To understand it, we must supply a background controversy within the Jewish Christian community to which this unknown author was probably writing. The controversy seems to have turned on the relation of the Son to angels: was he one or not?[36] That there were some in these churches who thought Christ was an angel, we know because "Paul" attacks such at Colossians 2.18. We also find angels regarded as intercessors or mediators in *Enoch*. Perhaps these people were Essene converts? Philo Judaeus shows that these terms were common coin: "If there be any as yet unfit to be called a son of god, let him press to take his place under God's first-born, the Logos, the oldest among the angels, an archangel as it were."[37]

The author of Hebrews wants to put a stop to all this, so he cites seven scriptural *testimonia* to show the Son superior to angels—*testimonia* that had previously been collected in the early Church to show the Son as eternal and divine, also incarnate, baptized, resurrected, and ascended.[38] These *testimonia* include a longer form of Deuteronomy 32.43 than the one in the Greek Bible, the Septuagint, "heavens (?) rejoice with him and let all the sons of God prostrate themselves before him" [sons of God, *benē 'elōhīm*, is in the Hebrew now attested by a fragment at Qumran], together with the Greek form of Psalm 97.7: "let all the angels prostrate themselves before him." Hebrews 1.6 cites the order given to the angels or sons of god in these two texts and makes it refer to Christ instead of to the newly anointed king, as it does in the Old Testament. And on one reading the inferiority of the angels is rather cruelly stressed. As the dogma was later interpreted, the text claims that the son was begotten, not created, and so not equal, but superior, to the angels.

Angels are a late development in Old Testament theology: the word is Greek and usually translates the Hebrew *mal'āk Yahweh* or *benē 'elōhīm*, the latter of which terms is also rendered into the Greek Bible as *hoi huioi tou theou*, "sons of God," as at Genesis 6.2. Historically these terms refer to the

[36] For the background, see L. D. Hurst, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 45–46 and 77. Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: a Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 103–21, compares 1 Cor. 6.3, 11.10. Gal. 4.9, and 1 Pet. 3.22, and says the "cultus of angels competed seriously with faith in Christ." See also Hugh Montefiore, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1964), pp. 40–42. The Epistle was attributed to Paul, but is certainly not by him.

[37] Philo Judaeus, *De confusione linguarum. Les oeuvres de Philon d'Aléxandre*, Vol. 13., ed. J. G. Kahn (Paris: Cerf, 1963), p. 146.

[38] Montefiore, *Commentary*, p. 44.

members of the heavenly court, a widespread mythological concept in the ancient Near East, and obviously at odds with the more rigorous kinds of Jewish monotheism. Once the heavenly courtiers became angels, they were also "sons of God," as Milton's Satan insists. The chances were high in the early Church that Christ was not to be the sole Son of God but what some orthodox theologians continued to call him into the fourth century—"prince of angels."

However late their arrival, angels were by now too well established in the religious consciousness for them to be excluded entirely, though Pharisees and Saducees took opposite views about them. In the same argumentative tradition, the author of Hebrews amasses several other proof-texts to put these angels in their place. The whole letter may be read as establishing a network of connections for the much-quoted messianic Psalm 110, which begins: "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." The first chapter of Hebrews, which is indeed the basis of God's inaugural speech in *Paradise Lost*, quotes it prominently (v. 13) as well as Psalm 2.7, 2 Samuel 7.14, Psalm 104.4, and other Old Testament *testimonia*. For Milton, the most important of these *testimonia* was the quotation from Psalm 2. The reformers in fact generally took Psalm 2.6–9 as the basic promise of all Scripture: Calvin took it as God's solemn decree of the kingdom and Luther as the highest article of faith.[39] The verse quoted in Hebrews reads, "Thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee." Elsewhere in the primitive Church this *testimonium* was applied to the Resurrection, not the generation of the Son (Rom. 1.4, Acts 13.33f, which also conflated it with Isa. 42.1 to be said at baptism). Here in Hebrews, though, it is used to distinguish the Son from the angels, since they also existed before the creation of the world, and are called "sons of God." Some heretical Christians even mixed them up, and in the Arian context, especially important for Milton, it was proper to call the Son of God an angel. And curiously enough, the Hebrews passage, especially 1.4 ("so much better than the angels"), was used to show the connection.[40] So much for this effort, at least, to exalt Christ above the angels.

In the tradition common to the *Vita*, the *Questions of Bartholemew*, and the *Apocalypse of Shedrach*, a tradition that begins in sectarian Judaism and then enters Christianity, the special new man made in the image of God is the object of adoration. It looks as if the author of Hebrews may be aware of this recent development and is adapting it to the "newborn Son" concept of Christianity. And we may infer from the polemical potential of this manner of citation that the corresponding refusal of Satan, an angel, to worship man was also by now at least a narrative potential in the anterior tradition of Hebrews, and transferred by its author to Christ, the new Adam. On a strong reading

[39] Christopher, *Science*, pp. 90–91; Revard, *War in Heaven*, pp. 66–78.

[40] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, Vol. 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 183–97.

one may hear sneering, and thus angelic resentment just below the surface of the Hebrews text ("to what angel did God ever say, 'Thou art my Son . . . '?; "to what angel has he ever said, 'Sit at my right hand . . . '?"), and then it is not such a big step to imagining Satanic resentment. So far from settling the matter, then, the references thus far unearthed from the Hebrews passage at the very least show that it was part of a similar controversy to the one that has kept Miltonists in work for so long.

The story as it is told in the *Questions of Bartholemew* also makes a narrative link with the seduction of Eve by Satan, in a more thorough and explicit way than does the *Vita* version. Eager to provoke the Fall of Man, who is supposed to be responsible for his own fall, Satan approaches Eve, and makes desire overcome her. Behind this story lies the Jewish tradition of the birth of Cain from the union of Satanic angel (Sammael) and Eve, found in the Targum, and probably referred to (but palliated) in the New Testament at John 8.44: "you are of your father the devil," says Jesus to the Jews, "and the sins of your father you will do" (see chap. 9, below). To achieve this seduction in the *Questions of Bartholemew*, Satan makes use of a kind of magic potion: he takes sweat from his chest and the hair elsewhere on his body, mixes it in a cup and pours it out into the waters of the four rivers of Paradise. This potion, when she drinks it, makes Eve helpless with desire for him.

Both of these buried stories, I suspect, Milton unearthed by his close and careful reading of Scripture and those various apocryphal and heretical texts to which he had access. In each case, what he uncovered, or glimpsed behind the texts he cites (many of them constantly), is the originating controversy for the quarrels that had flared up in his own time and in which he happily joined. Sometimes by inversion, sometimes by cunning adaptation, he makes these buried narratives active again in his versions of those multilayered explanatory myths with which his Christian tradition had tried to make sense of itself. And this is especially true for the myth of origins itself. Though no specific source of Milton's rebellion story has been found, or has ever existed, yet we may imagine him finding or inventing the story simply by reading Scripture in the light of the conflicts he understood so well. And the presence of apocryphal and heretical variants within these source materials could give extra license, if any were needed, to his imagination.

6. *Psalm 2*

We discover an example of this creative process if we now follow the Hebrews reference back to see what is actually happening in Psalm 2, one of the basic texts for *Paradise Regain'd*,[41] and also, given its importance for Luther and Calvin, for *Paradise Lost*, as well. Psalm 2 is probably a tenth-century B.C.E. royal

[41] Mary Ann Radzinowicz, *Milton's Epics and the Book of Psalms* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 202.

psalm, written for a coronation,[42] but as the first verses show, the occasion for this coronation (or anointing) is a rebellion or uprising among local rulers (kings of the earth, as they are somewhat grandly called). It is in this context that the king is called the Anointed One, and God then says: "You are my son, this day have I begotten you" (v. 7).[43] More recent Bibles try to make it clearer by saying, for example, "Today I have become your father," which is equally puzzling until we realize it means that the king is here adopted by Yahweh, and no blood relationship or generation is implied.[44] And the new king's task, the reason for his adoption, is clearly to put down the rebellion.

The text that in Milton's poem provokes the rebellion, then, was originally (if we halt the quest for sources at this arbitrary point) a promise that the new king would put it down. Milton inverts the order, but only just. Indeed God's language in Milton, as we saw, implies by its commanding present tense a rebellion that is also present. God's speech barely conceals its original, which we need to unearth in order to read fully Milton's difficult God. Once we do so, we realize that Milton almost has his God, like Hesiod's Zeus, be the rebel, the one who disturbs the settled order of Heaven. In Milton the ambivalence is all God's: it makes him evoke a rebellion against his own decree, and so

[42] Mitchell Dahood, ed., *Psalms 1–50* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Bible, 1965), p. 12. Milton translated the psalm himself and added a phrase: lines 11–12 read "but I, saith hee, / Anointed have my King (though ye rebell) / On Sion my holi'hill." Charles Dahlberg, "Paradise Lost V 603 and Milton's Psalm II," *Modern Language Notes* 67 (1952): 23–24, suggested this meant he was already (1653) linking rebellion and elevation to kingship. See Revard, *War in Heaven*, pp. 99–102.

[43] That he was puzzled by the word "begotten" is clear from what Milton writes in the *De doctrina Christiana*:

> When all the above passages, and especially the second Psalm, have been compared and digested carefully, it will be apparent that, however the Son was begotten, it did not arise from natutral necessity, as is usually maintained, but was just as much a result of the father's decree and will as the Son's priesthood, kingship, and resurrection from the dead. The fact that he is called "begotten," whatever that means, and God's *own Son*, Rom. viii.32, does not stand in the way of this at all. (YP 6.208.)

The theological issues are referred to and summarized in Maurice Kelley's remarkable notes to the Yale edition. This is by far the longest section of Milton's treatise, and he faces all the issues he dramatizes in the poem as contentious. Satan stands for much of what Milton there rejects, though not without recognizing how strong are the opposition's arguments.

[44] Compare 2 Sam. 7.14, where Yahweh also says to David (via Nathan), "I will be his father, and he shall be my son". In Ps. 89.20–27, we have the same thing: David is anointed and promised victory over various foes, including those old enemies, sea and river. "Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth." Dahood suggests that the biblical idea of adoption is contrary to the more traditional concept of divine kingship, where the ruler is "offspring of the gods and may be suckled at divine breasts" (*Psalms*, p. 12), but surely the two concepts are necessary to each other: here divine offspring is "adopted" into the earthly succession. For the extensive interpretations of Psalm 2.7 in Christian literature and among Miltonists, see Austin C. Dobbins, *Milton and the Book of Revelation: the Heavenly Cycle* (Birmingham: University of Alabama Press, 1975), pp. 1–5, 55–60, and Ide, "On the Begetting."

almost turns his decree back into what it originally was, a threat that the new king would prove stronger than his enemy.

Nor is it only Satan who reads the decree this way. The Son soon comments on what has happened, and implies that he has been made a king precisely in order to quell the pride of these rebels:

> Mightie Father, thou thy foes
> Justly hast in derision, and secure
> Laugh'st at thir vain designes and tumults vain,
> Matter to mee of Glory, whom thir hate
> Illustrates, when they see all Regal Power
> Giv'n me to quell thir pride, and in event
> Know whether I be dextrous to subdue
> Thy Rebels, or be found the worst in Heav'n.
>
> (PL 5.735–42)

Of course the divine pair are already planning a military operation against the rebellious angels, since God's "Eternal eye" has discerned "Rebellion rising" (5.711–15). But at the moment when the Son was exalted to his new role, anointed and begotten, there were supposedly, except in God's mind and so in his speech, no such rebels whose pride needed quelling. We can see here the influence of the biblical original to which Milton is faithful, even if it creates this new and minor absurdity, and gives us a new version of the old story of origins.

Even though he transformed the story of Satan's jealousy into a myth of the very origin of the Devil, nonetheless the key moment of his story, the primal scene of the birth of evil, is thus eluded, as in all such myths. It is as if Milton underlines by this absence the impossibility of fulfilling the quest for the beginning. Though we sometimes think of *Paradise Lost* as a hymn or a song, it is neither. It keeps at a distance the world of magical shamanic healing in which the song of origins can again be present and active. Of course though irrecoverable in that sense, the myth recurs as myth and may still bear meaning for its present readers: authoritarian rulers will still provoke adverse reactions, and the narrative of loss can still construct an image of what is not, but might have been, might yet be. But all these possible meanings are qualified or held in suspension by this impossible original rebellion. Tucked into the middle of the poem is this ironic commentary on its own project, and that of all Milton's predecessors and followers or critics. The most original narrative choice in the poem has to do with exactly that moment, the moment of origins, that cannot be reached. We get the old story, then, as those old poet-shamans would give it, but as story, and we also get its built-in provocation, teasing us into thought.

SIX
The Language of "Evil"

> The Greek Philosophers abstained from introducing the Devil.
> —SHELLEY, "On the Devil, and Devils"

1. *Classical versus Christian*

The ambivalence of Satan's relation to evil is important for the meaning of the poem. As we have seen, he explicitly rejects Michael's term "evil" for the War in Heaven, which "wee style / The strife of Glorie" (6.289–90). And when, for the only time, he is called "the Evil one," it is at the very moment when he stands "Stupidly good" (9.465) abstracted "From his own evil."[1] Nonetheless the poem is about the origin of evil, and in this chapter I shall investigate the scrupulous ways in which Milton deploys what he knew to be the various sources for the concept of evil, both the classical and the Christian. We shall see that Milton holds them quite distinct, but also puts them to unexpected uses.

The use of classical forms for Judeo-Christian concepts leads to frequent tensions between form and content: we see this in the invocations to the "Heavenly" Muse, in the relations between husband and wife (Eve is no stay-at-home Andromache or bride-prize Lavinia), and especially in the narration of celestial warfare or in the search for true heroism. The language and techniques of classical epic bring with them their dominant subjects—warfare and the grandly adventurous journey—along with the heroic values explored or (mostly) celebrated in Homer or Vergil. Yet these values are explicitly depreciated in Milton's poem. He claims to be "Not sedulous by Nature to indite / Warrs, hitherto the onely Argument / Heroic deem'd," (9.28–30), insisting that the subject of his poem, though tragic, is

> Not less but more Heroic then the wrauth
> Of stern *Achilles* on his Foe pursu'd
> Thrice Fugitive about Troy Wall; or rage
> Of *Turnus* for *Lavinia* disespous'd,
> Or *Neptun*'s ire or *Juno*'s, that so long
> Perplex'd the Greek and *Cytherea*'s Son.
>
> (PL 9.14–19)[2]

[1] See chap. 1.1, p. 27, n. 8, and chap. 9.2, below.

[2] It is curious that these lines mention the wrath of Achilles and Turnus, but not the dramatic and problematic conclusion of the *Aeneid*, in which Aeneas butchers his defeated opponent even

Nonetheless these heroic values remain influential throughout the poem, and Milton expects his readers to think so. They affect both the beginning and the end of history. Thus even in the final book, when Adam is told about the incarnation of Christ and the consequent Redemption of mankind, he expects single epic combat between his descendant, Christ the Son, and the great enemy, Satan.

> Needs must the Serpent now his capital bruise
> Expect with mortal paine: say where and when
> Thir fight, what stroke shall bruise the Victors heel.
>
> (PL 12.383–85)

Michael has to tell him differently:

> Dream not of thir fight,
> As of a Duel, or the local wounds
> Of head or heel: not therefore joynes the Son
> Manhood to God-head.
>
> (PL 12.386–89)

Michael explains that the atonement (the point of the incarnation) has to do not with destroying Satan, as Aeneas kills Turnus at the end of the *Aeneid*, but rather "his works / In thee and in thy Seed" (12.394–95)—and that internal victory must be won by obedience and love. Adam's problem, then, is that he is a Christian hero in a classical poem, and needs gradually to learn the difference, as does the reader.[3]

The difference is most acute, and most troublesome, in those parts of the poem that explore the language of evil. In the last chapter I explained the

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in his supplication. Is this the slight to Vergil that David Norbrook imagines in *Writing the English Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 440? Or does it indicate Milton's sympathy for the hero's righteous anger, as Rachel Falconer suggests in her review of Norbrook, *Milton Quarterly* 34 (2000): 28? For the parallel with God's wrath, see below, n.75. Compare with this the famous passage at 11.688–99, where the giants of Genesis 6.4–5 are denounced as if they had been epic heroes:

> For in those dayes Might onely shall be admir'd,
> And Valour and Heroic Vertu call'd;
> To overcome in Battle, and subdue
> Nations, and bring home spoils with infinite
> Man-slaughter, shall be held the highest pitch
> Of human Glorie.
>
> (PL 11.689–95)

See John M. Steadman, *Milton's Epic Characters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), pp. 177–93.

[3] Perhaps the clearest statement of this problem is still Harold R. Swardson's chapter on Milton in *Poetry and The Fountain of Light*, pp. 104–153. In an excess of modesty, Swardson claimed he would not have published had he seen John Peter, *A Critique of* Paradise Lost (New York, 1960), while he was writing.

complexities of Milton's story of the origin of Satan. In this chapter we extend the enquiry to the subsequent events. The point will be to see how Milton probes and questions the traditions of evil and the meanings of the related words.

2. *Hate in Heaven*

The problem of evil is posed acutely in the central episode of the poem. Adam and Eve listen to the angel Raphael's story about the War in Heaven that launched time and history as we know them. Having heard the story, they are filled

> With admiration, and deep Muse to heare
> Of things so high and strange, things to thir thought
> So unimaginable as hate in Heav'n,
> And Warr so neer the Peace of God in bliss.
>
> (PL 7.52–55)

That luminous phrase "hate in Heav'n," as I noted earlier, contrasts two words that the alliteration brings together, like other apparent opposites: devils/deities, Hell/Heaven, Son/Satan, Eve/evil. The rhetorical figures of antithesis and paradox are here (as often in the seventeenth century) raised to metaphysical proportions. Evil becomes a cosmic, not only a human problem, and one that is said to be "unimaginable" to the first audience of the story.

"Admiration and deep Muse" might well be the listening postures for all of us at such a time, reproducing for the poem as a whole what Adam and Eve do for their epic-within-the-epic. Nonetheless, both words derive from classical tradition and may not be wholly fitting as a reaction to the desperately serious narrative of the origin of evil. "Admiration," according to the *OED*, often links wonder with approbation, while "Muse" means "meditate." For this meaning, the *OED* cites one of those marvellous etymologies of Walter Skeat: he connects the word with "muzzle," and makes it signify an attitude like that of "a dog sniffing the air when in doubt as to the scent." There also may be, as the *OED* allows in its more sober mood, some overlap with the concept of the Muses. Arguably these words signal that not only Adam and Eve, but the innocence of classical Greek culture, could not comprehend the sheer malevolence of Satan. After all, as Milton well knew, Plato's response to a similar problem, strife and battle among the Homeric gods, had been to have his Socrates, in a famous passage of the *Republic* (377e–80), reject the stories as untrue.[4] So Adam's problem may rather be that he is a classical hero in a Christian poem, and fails (until too late) to learn the difference.

[4] For Plato's criticism of poetry (esp. Homer and tragedy), see Penelope Murray, ed., *Plato on Poetry. Ion; Republic* 376e–398b9; Republic 595–608b10, Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), here pp. 52–56, 138–45. For

Milton's Adam and Eve do at least have a more reflective reaction than does Socrates: the narrator of the story is after all not a lying classical poet but an angel. But Adam's reaction ("with his consorted *Eve*") is not horror. They are innocent creatures, and have listened, like children, to a fearful story with a happy ending. There may well, then, be some irony in the poet's description of the next stage of their reaction. They have heard, he says, about war so near "the Peace of God,"

> but the evil soon
> Driv'n back redounded as a flood on those
> From whom it sprung, impossible to mix
> With Blessedness. Whence *Adam* soon repeal'd
> The doubts that in his heart arose: and now
> Led on, yet sinless, with desire to know
> What neerer might concern him, how this World
> Of Heav'n and Earth conspicious first began.
>
> (PL 7.56–63)

The dramatic irony is clear: nothing concerns Adam more nearly than the story he has just heard of the origin and present existence of Satan. Yet Adam quickly puts aside his doubts because of the happy ending. The first part of this quotation suggests free indirect style; it is Adam's thought about the narrative as well as the narrator's summary of its ending. He immediately asks the angel to switch from a narrative based on classical epic, with all its blood and terror (Book 6), to a narrative that will reproduce the first chapter of the Book of Genesis (Book 7). The reaction indicates that he has not understood the point of the war narrative, which was to show that the same enemy is now threatening him. And this in spite of Raphael's explicit warning that Adam is to "beware / By what is past"; therefore he has told the story of

> *Satan*, hee who envies now thy state,
> Who now is plotting how he may seduce
> Thee also from obedience . . .
> . . . . . .
> remember, and fear to transgress.
>
> (PL 6.900–12)

Adam does not shift from the mode of wonderment at hate in Heaven to that of fear for hate on Earth. Raphael has failed in the purpose given him by God, to get across a warning of the true situation, and Milton thus raises the ques-

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Milton's Plato, see Irene Samuel, *Plato and Milton* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1947); she claims that Milton "gave to Plato a position far above any other author, pagan or Christian, save the authors of the Bible" (p. 20). He was the only author to whose works Milton accorded the (conventional) epithet "divine" (*Apology against a Pamphlet*; YP 1.891, where he also cites the Homer passage from the *Republic* 377e–85).

tion whether his own audience will do any better. He hopes, he says, that he will "fit audience find, though few" (7.31)—and this just some thirty lines before he represents the inadequate reaction of Adam, Raphael's audience, to his own version of classical epic.

And what of Eve? That is an even more vital question, given what is to happen later, but we are not told. Indeed the switch between singular and plural audiences throughout Raphael's narrative leaves it unclear what Eve actually hears: Raphael's "warne / thy weaker" (6.908–9) at the end of the story strongly implies Eve was not there to hear Raphael's warning, but "with his consorted *Eve*" (7.51) that she was.[5]

3. *The "Problem of Evil"*

From the historical point of view, it may be better to conceive of Adam as a classical hero in a Christian poem. It is not so much the representation of evil as war, nor even the origin of evil in Heaven that he cannot grasp, but the idea of evil itself. Indeed, evil as a metaphysical principle is usually regarded by historians of ideas as of Judeo-Christian rather than classical origin. The Greek words for evil are not exact: *to kakon* is the closest, especially in tragedy, but it means so many things, including both "cowardice" and "base birth" (concepts of heroic origin), and is so often plural or merely particular; *to aischron* means rather "shameful" or "disgusting," and is usually opposed to *to kalon* as ugliness to beauty or vice to virtue; *ponēria* covers any defects or blemish, moral or otherwise. No one Greek word covers all of what we mean by the concept "evil," and there was no such thing as what theologians call the "problem of evil."[6]

The classical world admired and often reverenced the order of created things. When Plato's *Timaeus* introduces his description of creation, he begins with

[5] At 8.41 Eve sits "retir'd in sight," but at 9.278 she "Just then returnd": see Flannagan (RM, n.91, p. 592) and Jean Gagen, "Did Milton Nod?", *Milton Quarterly* 20 (1986): 17–22.

[6] The fullest discussion is Friederich Billicsich, *Das Problem des Übels in der Philosophie des Abendlandes*, *I. Von Platon bis Thomas von Aquino*, 2d enlarged ed. (Wien: Sexl, 1955). Plato's various and naively optimistic discussions of evil (or evils) are at *Gorgias* 477e, *Theaetetus* 176a, *Politikos* 269c–d, 273b–c, *Lysis* 221 a–c, *Cratylus* 403e–f, *Timaeus* 42d, 48a, 53b, 86b–c, *Laws* 10, 903b–905d. His general solution is that either evils are not the work of god, or they are not really evils, but deserved punishments. We call things evil, runs the argument in *Laws* 10, out of ignorance. See Friedrich Solmsen, *Plato's Theology*, Cornell Studies in Classical Philology 27 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1942), and Mark L. McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976). Harold F. Cherniss, "The Sources of Evil according to Plato," *American Phililosophical Society* 98 (1954): pp. 23–37, argued that evil does not become a problem until the mystery religions dominate. Extended discussion is also to be found in Gerhard Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 Vols., (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1951–76), or its German original, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1933–79), s.v. *kakos*, *poneros*, and in Keith Grayston, "Evil," in Alan Richardson, ed., *Theological Word Book of the Bible* (London: SCM Press, 1950).

the firm statement that the creator "was good; and in the good no jealousy about anything can ever arise. So, being without jealousy, he desired that all things should come as near as possible to being like himself" (129e). Aristotle, similarly, begins his *Nicomachean Ethics* by saying:

> Every art and every inquiry, and likewise every action and practical pursuit, is thought to aim at some good: hence it has rightly been said that the Good is that at which all things aim.

This principle helps to account for the notion that becomes so important in Augustine, that evil is simply the absence of good.[7] Even in reflecting on tragedy in the *Poetics*, Aristotle maintains that happy endings are the best, and that what goes wrong therein is *hamartia*. This innocent notion, which is best translated as "error" or "missing the mark," derives ultimately from the Socratic argument that sin is error, which in turn is caused by ignorance.[8] Moderns in general, Christian or post-Christian, have had trouble with the rather amoral notion of *hamartia*: it often becomes "flaw," "fault," or even "sin" in translations of the *Poetics*.[9] Tragedy may well have been, from a modern perspective, the Greek way of thinking about how to face evil,[10] but that is not how Aristotle presents it to its own audience.

[7] The best discussion known to me of what is otherwise a rather puzzling doctrine is in Richard Waswo, "Damnation, Protestant Style: Macbeth, Faustus and Christian Tragedy," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 4(1): 63–85. He points in particular to the discussion in Aquinas (*Summa Theologica* 1.49.1) and to a Protestant preacher, John Preston, who uses the image of a blinded horse that, the further it runs, the further it gets from its true direction: "So it is with sinne, though it in it selfe bee but a meere privation, yet it is seated in the soule, which is alwaies active," *An Elegant and Lively Description of the Spiritual Life and Death* (London, 1632), 1, p. 5. See also Russell, *Satan*, pp. 111–12.

[8] Kierkegaard, heir of the much more pessimistic Christian worldview, and so of the cosmic idea of evil, puzzles about this Socratic optimism in *Sickness Unto Death* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), p. 218.

[9] English translations of the *Poetics* are often influenced by the fact that *hamartia* is the ordinary New Testament word for "sin" (G. Stählin shows that *hamartia* is almost always a matter of "offense in relation to God with emphasis on guilt," in Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary*, Vol. 1, s.v. *hamartano*, *hamartema*, *hamartia*, p. 295 [Eng.] and p. 297 [Ger.]). But others offer "some error or frailty"; Gerald F. Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: the Argument* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, [1957] 1963), p. 376, and Walter Kaufmann, *Tragedy and Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1968), pp. 70–71, argue for "error" as the correct translation, even if "flaw" and "error" are not in fact so easy to keep apart in Greek. In the view of Stephen Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, (London: Duckworth, 1986), pp. 215–37, citing the work of T.C.W. Stinton ("*Hamartia* in Aristotle and Greek Tragedy," *CQ* 25 (1975): 221–54), *hamartia* has a range of meanings including "ignorance," "error," and "fault" and should be made consistent with the idea that a relatively good man may fall innocently into misfortune.

[10] Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon, 1967), pp. 211–31, makes this case well. The original French work is *La Symbolique du mal*, Vol. 2 of *Finitude et Culpabilité* (Paris: Auber Montaigne, 1960). This work has been influential in philosophical circles, especially in the "History of Religions" school associated with the University of Chicago. It is extensively cited, for example, in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987) in the

The "problem of evil" was anticipated most clearly by Epicurus (341–270 B.C.E.), who expressed it thus as a part of his argument that the gods pay no attention to our world:

> God either wishes to take away evils, and is unable; or He is able, and is unwilling; or He is neither willing nor able, or He is both willing and able. If He is willing and is unable, He is feeble, which is not in accordance with the character of God; if He is able and unwilling, He is envious, which is equally at variance with God; if He is neither willing nor able, He is both envious and feeble, and therefore not God; if He is both willing and able, which alone is suitable to God, from what source then are evils? or why does He not remove them?

This passage survives because it is quoted (in Latin) by Lactantius (260–340 C.E.) in his newly Christian context.[11] It poses the terms of the problem in the way the Christian world was beginning to face it. Indeed, in discussing this early form of the dilemma, the contemporary Christian theologian John Hick admits that "No argument, it seems, could be simpler or clearer than this."[12] Quite so. As a theist, Hick is obliged to answer the argument, but he admits he cannot do so without making things very complicated indeed. Occam's razor, one might suppose, would destroy theodicy;[13] that is, the extraordinarily bold attempt "to justify the ways of God to men." Nevertheless when Epicurus formulated the dilemma, he appears to have used the plural (Lactantius's

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article on "evil." But one may take issue—while admitting the usefulness of the typology he presents—with the implied progression that Ricoeur's Protestantism appears to espouse from supposedly primitive and ritually based defilement to communal sin to individual sin (and guilt); see, for example, Donald Taylor, "Theological thoughts about evil," in *The Anthropology of Evil*, ed. David Parkin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), pp. 31–32. My own view is that Ricoeur is wrong to accord priority to *symbols* of evil over the narrative contexts, usually *myths*, in which these symbols appear. But in this respect he follows a long tradition of folklorists, for whom, in the prestructuralist world, the *motif* always had priority over the *tale*. In *Le mal: un défi à la philosophie et à la théologie* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1986), however, Ricoeur appears to change his position on this issue.

[11] H. Usener, *Epicurea* (Leipzig and Berlin: Teubner, 1887; Stuttgart: Teubner, 1966), frag. 374, p. 252–53, in Lactantius, *De ira Dei* 13.19, translated as *On the Anger of God*, chap. 13.20–21, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1985 [American reprint of the Edinburgh edition]), p. 270; see the discussion in the "Sources Chrétiennes" series, *La Colère de Dieu*, ed. Christianne Ingremeau (Paris: Editions Cerf, 1982), p. 310, for the parallel citation, but with a different ordering of the hypotheses, from Sextus Empiricus (*hypot. pyrrh.* 3.10s). See also Wolfgang Schmidt, "Epikur," in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 5 (1962): 786 (Idem, *Ausgewählte philologische Schriften*, ed. H. Erbse and J. Küppers [Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1984], pp. 238f.). Milton refers to Lactantius explicitly, and this passage will have been known to him; see Kathleen Hartwell, *Lactantius and Milton* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929).

[12] John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 5.

[13] A term apparently invented, after Milton's poem was written, by his (much) younger contemporary Leibniz.

mala), and does not refer to a singular "evil." This singular abstraction seems to appear not in classical Greek contexts but concomitantly with the developing idea of the Devil in Jewish apocalyptic, and then spectacularly, in Christian contexts.

In the various Gnostic movements especially, instead of the reverence for cosmic order demonstrated by classical Greek philosophy, a large and extremely influential spiritual movement had come to hate that order. No longer was the visible universe equated with order, beauty, and harmony, all of which are implications of the Greek word *kosmos* within its classical context: rather it has become the visible aspect of a malign and vicious jailer, the repressive "law and order" of a hated tyrant. And his chains are *Hylē*, matter.[14] We are close here to the Pauline idea of "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4.4).

4. *Satan and Ancient Evils*

The boundary between that which is genuinely classical and that which appears in the *koinē* Greek vocabulary of the New Testament and the early Fathers may be drawn most clearly by the figure of Satan, the Prince of this World. Despite the many classical allusions with which the later tradition, and Milton, dignified the character of Satan, his genesis and his role in the Christian scheme put him outside the classical Greek legacy. Indeed, if the reference in 1 Chronicles 21.1 (the only time where an independent Satan with no definite article appears in the Old Testament) is influenced by Persian dualism, then he would even be outside the older Hebrew tradition, as well.[15] All his associations are with the radical dualism or anticosmism of the religious environment within which he "grew up." Thus though they should not be confused, the two ideas, "evil" and "devil," develop within similar contexts, and in reaction to the general sense of helplessness that the subjects of the Seleucid, and then the Roman, Empire, seem to have experienced. Satan, we have seen, emerges from apocalyptic and sectarian movements within Judaism like the Essenes or the Jesus sect.[16] Members of such movements saw themselves as engaged in spiritual battles, and they adopted the widespread myths of combat to tell their story to themselves and make sense of the terrifying political events of the period. Time would soon end, and the Sons of Light would prevail in the final battle over the armies of the Angel of Darkness.

This special and isolated origin of Satan within the tradition of Judeo-Christian writings is scrupulously followed in Milton's story of the rebellion in which Satan takes his origin. No doubt the rebellion among the gods, as we

[14] See Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, p. 211: he cites Alexander of Lycopolis for this Manichaean, demonized view of matter.

[15] Jacob M. Myers, *I Chronicles* (New York: Doubleday, 1965), pp. lxxxvii–ix. See chap. 1.5, above.

[16] Cohn, Norman, *Cosmos*, pp. 188–211. See chap. 1.4, above.

saw in the previous chapter, is a narrative paradigm with strong precedents in several mythologies of the ancient Near East, and Milton knew Hesiod's version. But the core of the episode is, like a chapter of his theological treatise, a network of biblical quotations. In Milton's highly original story, Satan comes into being in Raphael's narrative quite simply in reaction to God's Word. Suddenly he is there, not as Lucifer, or any of his other names, but as the enemy, as he who disobeys.

5. *Allecto: Hell's Fury*

So far we have followed the strong argument for a radical difference between classical and Christian concepts as sources of the idea of evil. But we have also confined the "classical" to what Greece represented. If we now extend the classical tradition to include Rome, we get a different view. Not only is *malum* closer to the modern senses of "evil," it is the word used in the Vulgate for several of those disparate Hebrew and Greek words, and indeed for the most influential discussions of the problem of evil, notably Augustine's "unde malum?".[17] A Latin pun is what made the fruit of the Garden, not identified in Genesis, into an apple, whereas had the language of Jerome been French, the fruit would no doubt have become a peach (Fr. *pêche*; *péché*, sin). Milton is very careful about the word "apple," allowing it only to Satan, first when he identifies the fruit at 9.585 as "those fair Apples," and thus trivializes it for Eve's benefit, and then when he gleefully makes fun of God and mankind to his fellow devils: "Him by fraud I have seduc'd / . . . , and the more to increase / Your wonder, with an Apple; he thereat / Offended, worth your laughter, hath giv'n up / Both his beloved Man and all his World" (10.485–89).[18] Milton probably knew something like the schoolroom Latin joke *malo malo malo malo* (I would rather be / Up an apple tree / Than a naughty boy / In adversity), as it becomes in the mouth of that evil little boy Miles in Benjamin Britten's opera *The Turn of the Screw*.[19]

But the presence of evil goes beyond the word itself in Latin. In Horace and Juvenal, there are instances of that "motiveless malignity" that Coleridge identified in Iago. In Ovid, we find that memorable sentence that Re-

[17] Augustine, *Confessions* 7.5. See Kenneth Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), pp. 86–93. See also Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, pp. 387–440; Paul Pritchard, *The Influence of the Fathers Upon Milton with Especial Reference to Augustine*, Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1925.

[18] On the misnamed "Sodom apples," see Karen Edwards, *Milton and the Natural World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 148.

[19] Frank Kermode, "The Midrash Mishmash," *New York Review of Books*, 23 Apr. 1998: 45. The 'a' is short in *mălum*, evil, long in *mālum*, apple. Milton seems to deploy the various Latin words, apart from "apple," around the notion of evil. *Malum* also means "mast" and in one simile Satan's spear is compared to "the tallest Pine / Hewn on *Norwegian* hills, to be the mast / Of some great Ammiral" (1.292–94). And since *malo* also means "I prefer" it may be significant that Milton has his Satan deliberately choose evil, in that famous phrase "Evil, be thou my Good" (4.110).

naissance schoolboys knew by heart: "video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor" (I see the better course and approve it, but I follow the worse).[20] In Vergil's *Aeneid*, there are certain features that point to a new sense of the universe as malevolent, especially the poignant beginning of the second, Italian half. Allecto introduces and virtually presides over the second part of the poem, and she is representative of this new sense of malignance. The poet signals how different she is by inviting comparison with Juno's first intervention in Book 1, when she invoked the god of the winds, Aeolus, to oppose Aeneas's destiny. Having failed in that Homeric venture, the vindictive Juno now goes beneath the forces of nature for very un-Homeric weapons, and invokes the aid of Tartarus.[21] She summarizes this escalation of the war in a line that Freud used, with somewhat different connotations, as the epigraph for *The Interpretation of Dreams*: "flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo" (7.312) (If I cannot bend the powers above, then I will arouse Hell). Even without Freud's signal, we could see that Juno's decision is a radical departure from previous tradition. She summons Allecto, a Fury whom even her sisters abhor, to incite frenzy in the Italians and thus oppose Aeneas's efforts to install himself peacefully in Latinus's territory. Allecto goes first to Lavinia's mother, Amata, maddening her by means of a snake that crawls its poison unnoticed through her body, then to Turnus himself (who first rejects her in her disguise as an old priestess, but is overcome by the snakes she hurls at him). She then incites the hunting hounds to chase the pet stag that Iulus promptly shoots, unaware that it is a pet: "nec dextrae erranti deus afuit" (7.498) (Some god did not allow his faltering hand to fail).[22] Finally she sounds the trumpet of war, and returns to Juno, mission accomplished.

This splendid invention of Vergil's certainly has precedents in Greece: Hesiod's Eris (Strife) and Night (Allecto, like the Dira of 12, is "virgo sata Nocte" [7.331]; virgin born of Night, cf. 12.846, 860), among those originary and earlier monsters who now inhabit Tartarus, the Gorgon myth for the poisonous snakes in the hair (7.341–48), and, above all, the Fury or Erinys and her sisters Tisiphone and Megaera.[23] (These creatures have in fact already appeared at the entrance to Vergil's underworld, 6.280–81.) But Zeus has over-

[20] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 7.20–21. It is quoted by Calvin at *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2.2.23, and appears frequently in devotional writing, partly because of its similarity to Paul's "the good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, mat I döv (Romans 7.19); Waswo, "Damnation," pp. 68–69.

[21] For a good discussion, see Victor Pöschl, *The Art of Vergil* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), pp. 24–29; also Pierre Courcelles, "Mille Nocendi Artes," *Lecteurs païens et lecteurs chrétiens de l'Enéide. I. Les temoignages littéraires* (Paris: Institut de France, 1984), pp. 539–48; Paul-Augustin Deproost, "Mille Nocendi Artes, les Préfigurations Virgiliennes du Mal dans la Poésie des Chrétiens Latins," in Watthee-Delmotte and Deproost, *Imaginaires du Mal*, pp. 55–68.

[22] *Aeneid* quotations are from the text of R. D. Williams (Basingstoke: Macmillan/St. Martins, 1972); translations are lightly adapted from Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Bantam, 1972).

[23] The parallels are explored in Wolfgang Hübner, *Dirae im römischen Epos*, Spudasmata 21 (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag: 1970), pp. 34–42.

come Hesiod's monsters, while the Greek Furies, in their best-known appearance in Aeschylus's *Eumenides,* are, despite their horrific appearance, servants of justice. They are to avenge the murder of Clytemnestra, not initiate an unprovoked and bloody war. Vergil's creature is an embodiment of *furor* in its darker sense of an uncontrolled and obsessive power, and opening with her lends the whole of the second, Iliadic and Italian part of the *Aeneid* a distinctly un-Homeric aura. Even though she works with qualities already present in the psyche of the victim (as Macbeth's weird sisters call up his "black and deep desires"), the very fact that she is given separate existence and free rein to work her sadistic will risks detaching her from any larger world of values. She acts as, and has all the poetic power of, an independent being.

Thus her powerful presence in the narrative, like Satan's in Milton's, needs to be held in check by explicit moral assertion. Vergil's Juno brusquely tells her upon her return that Jupiter will not allow her to wander freely in the upper air and she must return to the world of Dis:

> te super aetherias errare licentius auras
> haud pater ille velit, summi regnator Olympi.
> cede locis.
>
> (*Aen.* 7.557–59)[24]

> The lord of high Olympus will not let you wander free about the upper air. Be gone from here.

The result is one of those splendid Vergilian descriptions of landscape as the Fury returns to Tartarus through a hole in the Earth's crust.

> hic specus horrendum et saevi spiracula Ditis
> monstrantur, ruptoque ingens Acheronte vorago
> pestiferas aperit fauces, quis condita Erinys,
> invisum numen, terras caelumque levavit.
>
> (*Aen.* 7.568–71)

> Here appears a horrid cave, one of the breathing vents of savage Dis, and a huge abyss where Acheron bursts through opens its infectious jaws. Into this the Fury hid her hated power and relieved earth and sky.

Vergil then intervenes in his own voice, a rare occurrence in the poem,[25] to condemn the war that Allecto begins.

[24] This is obviously one source, by inversion, of the language in Milton's insistence that "by high permission of all-ruling heaven" Satan is left "at large to his own dark designs" (1.212–13). Milton's God, that much more powerful than Vergil's, can afford to leave a being like Allecto-Satan free in the world of humanity (the upper air or *aither*). That at least is the explanation most Christians have usually plumped for (God's mysterious ways making it all right in the end).

[25] Gordon Williams, *Technique and Ideas in the* Aeneid (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983) p. 215.

ilicet infandum cuncti contra omina bellum,
contra fata deum *perverso numine* poscunt.
(*Aen.* 7.583–84; italics mine)

Against the omens, all men call for unholy war, against the signs of divine will, under a *malign influence*.

Vergil apparently feels the need to remind us of the values we supposedly share with him (as Milton does more often), in this case that these men call for war under a malign influence, that the impulse that makes them do so is perverse.

The word *numen* obviously refers here to supernatural interference like Allecto's, although T. E. Page took it as the collective and misdirected will, and cited Lucretius 4.179. To cite Lucretius in order to distinguish supernatural from natural impulses is itself a loaded and perhaps perverse impulse, but the very fact that commentators may disagree about these matters (and so about Vergilian religion) is significant. It shows how far we are from the world of Homer, even of Hesiodic Tartaros, or classical Greek culture in general. This is rather the world of Roman (or at least Hellenistic) syncretism, of religious turmoil and doubt and apocalyptic expectation, where divine forces are imagined as battling for the world, as Vergil's gods do for Troy and Italy, and where the relation of those supernatural events to human action is philosophically problematic.[26] We may wonder, on rereading these Vergilian passages, whether the bald assertion of Jupiter's supreme power does much to counteract the cumulative effect of poetic darkness. In this literature, we certainly find a more pervasive and familiar sense of something recognizably evil. Thus it is apt that the *Aeneid* ends with a new Fury (or Dira) released this time by Jupiter himself, and with the pathos of Turnus's death. Aeneas has finally succumbed, despite all his efforts throughout the poem, to *furor*, to the malign influence of the Furies ("furiis accensus et ira terribilis"; 12.946–47). The absence of the Homeric reconciliation scene between the hero and his dead victim's relatives is itself a comment on the world that is coming into being in this poem. Greco-Roman rationalism has almost yielded to the mythological imaginings of the new religions and mystery cults, to their insistence on the unintelligibility of the world outside the closed circle of believers, and thus to a recognition of evil not as a means to an end, but as an end in itself.[27] Vergil

[26] See Devorah Dimant in Michael Stone, ed., *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), pp. 533–58, for discussion of this issue as it affects our reading of the Dead Sea Scrolls and apocalyptic in general.

[27] W. R. Johnson, *Darkness Visible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 144. E. R. Dodds's Sather Lectures, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), certainly made our thinking about "rationalism" in Greece more *nuancé*, by calling attention to the nonrational world represented both in popular culture and in literature. But our view of the Greek belief in man's ability to think his way through his problems was never materially affected by what Dodds uncovered in his marvellous book. On the contrary it made the philoso-

sails very close, in the conclusion of the poem, which he wished destroyed, to acknowledging those powers of darkness that were being released all over the world of the ancient Mediterranean, and of which Gnosticism and its rival, "Orthodox" Christianity, are such powerful signs.

The most explicit use of these Vergilian originals by Milton is in *Paradise Regained*, in a passage that shows the sheer inner strength of Christ. Satan is by now at his wit's end since all his efforts to tempt Christ have proved futile. After the temptation of classical learning (4.221–364), he returns Christ to the wilderness and has him pass through a dark night of the soul. The winds (imitating those of Aeolus) rush at him, there is a clear reference to the *axis mundi*, or World Tree, of *Aeneid* 4 whose roots reach down to Tartarus,[28] and then come the Ghosts and Furies from Vergil's Hell.

> nor slept the winds
> Within thir stony caves, but rush'd abroad
> From the four hinges of the world, and fell
> On the vext Wilderness, whose tallest Pines,
> Though rooted deep as high, and sturdiest Oaks
> Bow'd their Stiff necks, loaden with stormy blasts,
> Or torn up sheer: ill wast thou shrouded then,
> O patient Son of God, yet only stoodst
> Unshaken; nor yet staid the terror there,
> Infernal Ghosts, and Hellish Furies, round
> Environ'd thee, some howl'd, some yell'd, some shriek'd,
> Some bent at thee thir fiery darts, while thou
> Sat'st unappall'd in calm and sinless peace.
>
> (PR 4.413–25)

phers' achievement even more extraordinary by revealing the potentially hostile world in which they worked and wrote and talked. But even Dodds cannot show anything in Greek culture, whether in shamanic cult or in Bacchic orgy, that approximates what we find here in Vergil's Hell and Allecto, and the difference needs to be clearly marked. In imaginative terms, next to these inventions, Vergil's Jupiter is a cardboard cutout. See generally Denis C. Feeney, *The Gods in Epic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

[28] *Aeneid* 4.441–47. See R. D. Williams ad loc for the Homeric originals. Milton's line also imitates Tasso (who was himself following Vergil), *Gerus. lib.* 14.67: "some spirits howld, some barkt, some hist, some cride," as Fairfax's translation has it (quoted by Leonard ad loc). Characteristically Milton's lines also allude to Ephesians 6.16 about using the shield of faith to "quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." For the World Tree motif, see Hilda R. Ellis Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), pp. 190–96, and Mircea Eliade, *Traité d'histoire des religions*, ser. Bibliothèque scientifique (Paris: Payot, 1949), pp. 239–49, 281–84 (Idem, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. R. Sheed [New York: Sheed & Ward, 1958; reprinted Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996], pp. 273–86, 327–30), and Eliade, *Le chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase* (Paris: Payot, 1951), pp. 244–48 (Idem, *Shamanism. Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. W. R. Trask [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972], pp. 269–74). For more extensive discussion of these aspects of *Paradise Regain'd*, see Neil Forsyth, "'Having Done All To Stand': Biblical and Classical Allusion in *Paradise Regained*," *Milton Studies 21* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986), pp. 199–214.

The trees are the literal context for Christ's unruffled calm, but they are also allusions to Homeric tree similes and Vergilian imitations: Christ resists the buffeting of the storm as Aeneas does the appeals of Dido's sister Anna. Both are like sturdy trees in their resistance. But Christ is stronger than a Vergilian hero, since he calmly resists even those supernatural creatures to which Turnus succumbs. And given that it is Satan who orchestrates these events, it is apt that for the climax he uses the creatures of Vergil's Hell (Ghosts and Furies), "terrors dire" (4.431).

6. *The Darkness of Hell*

Hell, the place from which Allecto comes, is another sign of that darkening world in which Satan and the abstraction he often embodies, evil, were coming into being. An essential component of the Christian cosmos, Hell has scarcely any precedents in Jewish literature. Sheol, the Old Testament graveyard of the dead, takes on some of the characteristics of Hades (the standard translation in the Greek version, the Septuagint) in later Jewish texts. But before the Hellenistic period, however, when "syncretism" became widespread, Sheol (or sometimes Gehenna, a kind of garbage dump where the bodies of criminals were also thrown into fires that burned perpetually) was not much more than a spooky burial ground or vague place of the dead.[29] The Christian Hell derives, at the popular level, from various folk beliefs, and at the level of educated texts, from Vergil's reworking of the Homeric and Roman tradition. Given that Vergil was the classical author most often Christianized in the medieval tradition, especially through the Messianic reading of Eclogue 4 as a prophecy of Christ, it is Vergil who is most likely to provide a bridge (as he does for Dante) between classical and Christian, even on so momentous a topic as evil. Milton knows and signals this several times, and in particular long before we hear the story of Satan's rebellion, in the first episode the poem dramatizes: Satan in Hell. Here he does not have to explain how Satan came to be, although the picture powerfully affects the way we read the rebellion episode when we come to it in the course of the narrative. That first episode, Satan awakening in Hell, is where, for the reader, the figure of Satan

[29] A good popular account, with some fine illustrations, is Alice K. Turner, *The History of Hell* (London: Robert Hale, 1993). More scholarly work can be found in Kittel's entry under "Hades," and there is a useful summary by Duane Watson in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1992). Syncretism, the weak form of the relationship between Classical and Judeo-Christian (or more generally Eastern) religion, is a mild name for the fantastic cross-fertilization that was now taking place all over the Mediterranean world. At 1 *Enoch* 17, for example, a Jewish text that dates probably from the first century B.C.E., the description of the pillars of fire from Heaven that stretch down to Tartaros echoes Hesiod's account of the silvery pillars of the House of Styx, while the situation of the imprisoned angels is like that of the Titans. The uncertainty about the afterlife in the New Testament can be measured by comparing the parable of Dives and Lazarus at Luke 16.19–31 with the reference to an Old Testament type at Matthew 11.23 and Luke 10.15 (cf. Isaiah 14.13–15, on which see chap. 1, above).

originates. As in Shakespeare's tragedies with villains as heroes (*Richard III* and *Macbeth*), we meet and get close to him early.

Milton understands Vergil's Hell and reproduces it clearly, especially its most distinctive feature: even more than the monsters, and the bleakness, what he makes most of is its "darkness visible." There are many instances of this paradoxical quality in Vergil, from the uncertain luminosity that Aeneas perceives as he starts his underworld journey to the black light ("atro / lumine"), an oxymoron divided by line-end, that Allecto throws as a torch in to Turnus's dream (7.456–57). The best known is the odd beginning (*ibant*, imperfect tense) of Aeneas's journey:

> Di, quibus imperium est animarum, umbraeque silentes
> et Chaos et Phlegethon, *loca nocte tacentia late*,
> sit mihi fas audita loqui, sit numine vestro
> pandere res alta terra et caligine mersas.
> Ibant *oscuri sola sub nocte per umbram*
> perque domos Ditis vacuas et inania regna:
> quale per *incertam lunam sub luce maligna*
> est iter in silvis, ubi caelum condidit *umbra*
> Iuppiter, et *rebus nox abstulit atra colorem*.
>
> (*Aen.* 6.264–72; italics mine)[30]

Vergil's simile methodically deprives the eye of the images it presents.[31] It clearly anticipates Milton's "dreary plain, . . . / . . . voyd of light / Save what

[30] Dryden's translation:

> Ye realms yet unrevealed to human sight!
> Ye gods who rule the *regions of the night!*
> Ye gliding ghosts! permit me to relate
> The mystic wonders of your silent state.
> Obscure they went through dreary shades, that led
> Along the waste dominions of the dead.
> Thus wander travelers in woods *by night*,
> By the moon's *doubtful and malignant light*,
> When Jove in *dusky clouds* involves the skies,
> And the faint crescent shoots by fits before their eyes.
>
> (374–83)

Given the political situation, Dryden may not have felt able to present the realm of Dis as a *kingdom*. He also seems not fully to grasp that Vergil's underworld is not simply a place, but a state of mind and a dark feeling. See generally I. Proudfoot, *Dryden's Aeneid and Its Seventeenth Century Predecessors* (Manchester University Press, 1960), pp. 258–76. A more sympathetic view of Dryden's Vergil is to be found in Colin Burrow, "Vergil in English translation," in Charles Martindale, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Vergil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 28–30.

[31] Johnson, *Darkness Visible*, p. 88f, with a brilliant parallel from Conrad's *Secret Agent*. There is now an elaborate discussion in Richard Jenkyns, *Vergil's Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 450–57: "the scene is a depiction of negatives: a light that is virtually no light, a sky that is hidden from sight, a colour taken away."

the glimmering of these livid flames / Casts pale and dreadful" (1.180–83), and other paradoxes of Hell, like the burning lake or the fiery deluge. Cumulatively they show the difficulty of imagining Hell, and invite the reader to experience that difficulty for himself. What is more, Milton's adaptation begins the narrative, not merely of the underworld scene but, because Milton moves the experience of Hell to the beginning, of the whole poem. It describes what Satan sees as he awakens in Hell after being cast from Heaven.

> At once as far as Angels kenn he views
> The **dismal** Situation waste and wilde,
> A Dungeon horrible, on all sides round
> As one **great Furnace flam'd, yet from those flames**
> **No light**, but rather **darkness visible**
> Serv'd onely to discover sights of woe,
> **Regions of sorrow, doleful shades,** where peace
> And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
> That comes to all; but torture without end
> Still urges, and a **fiery Deluge**, fed
> With ever-burning Sulphur unconsum'd:
> Such place Eternal Justice had prepar'd
> For those rebellious, here thir Prison ordain'd
> In **utter darkness**, and thir portion set
> As far remov'd from God and **light of Heav'n**
> As from the Center thrice to th' utmost Pole.
>
> (PL 1.59–74; emphasis mine)

What is remarkable here is that Milton can reproduce some of Vergil's language (the flames are from Phlegethon, at *Aen.* 6.550–51), and, at the same time, without contradiction, allude to widely known paradoxes of the Judeo-Christian Hell. Job 10.22, for example, says that in the land of the dead, Sheol, "the light is as darkness." Contemporaries of Milton knew this theological enigma: Herrick, for example, writes that "The fire of hell this strange condition hath, / To burn not shine (as learned Basil saith)."[32] In his *Homilies on the Psalms xxviii*, Basil indeed explains that God separates the brightness of fire from its burning power: in Paradise fire can increase the joy of the blessed, while in Hell it helps torture the damned. The Basil passage is also cited by Aquinas, where it is debated whether the damned have any light and can see.[33] T. S. Eliot's complaint about Milton's phrases like "darkness visible," which he claimed to find difficult to imagine, thus has no theological or imaginative justification. On the contrary, he might have recalled Plutarch's discussion of

[32] L. C. Martin, ed., *The Poetical Works of Robert Herrick* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 387.

[33] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica, Suppl. xcvii 4*. A full discussion with these and many other references is John M. Steadman, "'Darkness visible': the Quality of Hellfire," in his *Milton's Biblical and Classical Imagery*, pp. 121–35.

the question, "Whether darkness can be visible to us."[34] The issue was of some philosophical and scientific interest, but it also has obvious symbolic resonance.

7. *"God created evil"*

Milton's Hell, then, is a Vergilian place (with some Dantesque additions).[35] But where does this Hell come from? That is not a question Vergil asks, but Milton does, and answers it. In doing so, he faces the key theological question of whether the Christian God creates evil: in Milton he does, but only in a subordinate clause. In the main clause, what he creates is Hell. The grammar of the text saves the phenomenon, exchanging nouns and adjectives, but (as usual) only just. The passage follows the council scene in Book 2, when the more adventurous devils take off to explore their new habitation, and do not much like what they see.

> through many a dark and drearie Vaile
> They pass'd, and many a Region dolorous,
> O're many a Frozen, many a fierie Alpe,
> Rocks, Caves, Lakes, Fens, Bogs, Dens, and shades of death,
> A Universe of death, which God by curse
> **Created evil, for evil only good**,
> Where all life dies, death lives, and Nature breeds,
> Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things,
> Abominable, inutterable, and worse
> Than Fables yet have feign'd, or fear conceiv'd,
> *Gorgons* and *Hydra's*, and *Chimera's* dire.
>
> (PL 2.618–29; emphasis mine)

The passage contains one of those memorably monosyllabic lines, accumulating stresses, that make the reading of Hell analogous to exploring it (compare 1.948–50, where, "Ore bog or steep, through strait, rough, dense, or rare," it is the voyaging Satan who "pursues his way, / And swims or sinks, or wades, or creeps, or flyes"). But the key line about evil, which seems short, is actually too long by one syllable, as Roy Flannagan points out (RM, n. 159, p. 399). Both occurences of the word "evil" cannot be pronounced as monosyllables (as in 3.683–84, "Hypocrisie, the onely evil that walks / Invisible"). The first one may be, but then sits oddly next to the second, which cannot (as in 1.163,

[34] T. S. Eliot, "Milton I," *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber, 1957), pp. 138–45; Plut. *De placitis philosophorum* 4, 15, 901 d–e [V p. 342 Bernardakis]. Fowler 1998 aptly cites among other parallels *Genesis B* 333, "thæt wæs leohtes leas / and wæs liges full."

[35] The young Milton read *Dante* "reverently" (as Flannagan puts it; RM, p. 299) and cites him frequently in his *Commonplace Book*. Beside the obvious reference here to "lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate" of *Inferno* 3.9, many other allusions are collected by Irene Samuel, *Dante and Milton* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966).

"Out of our evil seek to bring forth good"). These metrical marvels call strong, disruptive attention to the passage, which is dotted with unpleasant bits of the natural world, but also with classical monsters of various kinds—*Gorgons*, *Hydras*, and *Chimeras*—who threatened Aeneas during his underworld journey (*Aen.* 6.288–89).

But the most important allusion by far is the biblical text that attributes evil to God, Isaiah 45.7: "I form light and I create darkness; I produce good and I create evil."[36] In his theological treatise, *De doctrina Christiana*, Milton explains this unsettling text as follows: "that is, what afterwards became evil, and now remains so; for whatever God created was originally good, as he himself testifies, *Gen. i.* God always produces something good and just out of evil or injustice and creates, as it were, light out of darkness." The stark statement of the biblical text is thus avoided by introducing a narrative time scheme—"afterwards."[37]

The solution in the poem is to sail even closer to the wind, to repeat the biblical words but with the important grammatical modification that "evil" becomes an adjective in the phrase "created evil," and only then an abstract noun in the extension through apposition, "for evil only good."[38] The first use of the word is a predicate adjective agreeing with the pronoun "which," and so referring to "a universe of death." No question, then, but that God himself creates this dreadful place, and "by curse" at that. It is as if Milton imagines God uttering that common English curse "Damn!"—and Hell is the result. The relation of good to evil certainly gets very muddy, both linguistically and theologically. We may well have to read twice to see that these syntactic

[36] The word usually translated "evil" in the Hebrew Bible, as here, is *ra*; the primary meaning is "worthlessness" or "uselessness," hence bad or ugly. This Isaiah passage may be understood in relation to the opening verses of Genesis, which it appears to reimagine: it deploys the same verbs for "create," but such that the word there used for Adam's creation out of clay in 2.7 (*yotzer*) is here used for light (by *fiat* in Genesis), while the verb used for the creation of evil and darkness (*u-voreh* > *boreh*) repeats the famous untranslatable words for the whole Creation in the beginning: *b'reshith bara*. In Genesis 1.2, however, darkness is already over the face of the deep, not having been explicitly created. As a metaphysical entity there is not much about "evil" in Judaism, except for a brief flurry in the Second Temple period. There is no entry for "evil" in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*.

[37] *De doctrina Christiana* (CM 15.66; YP 6.333). See Introduction, 2, above. Dante's Inferno, it should be remembered, has an inscription that reads in part: "Divine Power Made Me and Supreme Power and Eternal Love" (3.5). It is worth noting that in spite of Milton's love of accumulating Biblical quotations to support his views, he finds few texts to endorse his special and important doctrine about good coming out of evil: apart from the Crucifixion itself, they are the Joseph story about converting Egypt from an agrarian to a mercantile economy, the cruelty suffered by martyrs in Acts 4.28 and Romans 11.11, and Paul's words about tolerating heresies, 1 Corinthians 11.19.

[38] By changing the biblical present to his own past tense, as R. A. Shoaf has pointed out to me, Milton also introduces another textual possibility: "create[d evil]". Hades, too, is found in "shades," a word that Milton uses frequently in this section.

niceties do not actually make God directly responsible for evil, at least as a nominal and philosophical abstraction. But he clearly makes something that is itself unequivocally evil. Plato, we recall, had condemned Homer and the tragic poets in the *Republic* 379–82, and argued (through the mouth of Socrates) that the gods were good and thus could not be responsible for evil. Milton appears to be taking the side of the poets, and increasing the moral ambivalence of his God.

8. *The Language of Sin*

The example of Milton's game with the word "evil" is actually a key to the way he transforms the traditional topos. As usual we can get at the characteristic Miltonic view through his play with language. God's creating Word fashioned the universe, but it did so by dividing it from him and within itself.[39] And human languages, after Babel and the confusion of tongues, are "a jangling noise of words unknown," "a hideous gabble," a "hubbub strange" (12.55–60). This "confusion" (the etymology of "Babel" according to both the Geneva and the Authorized Version at Gen. 11.9) is never explicitly dispelled or corrected, either in the Bible or in Milton. The poem thus casts doubt on what people say and believe, on those narratives that count as authority to the communal mind, and that record the collective experience and wisdom, even the laws, of the peoples to whom we belong and owe allegiance.

What Eve really likes about the serpent, after all, is that he talks:

> What may this mean? Language of Man pronounc't
> By Tongue of Brute, and human sense exprest?
> . . . . . .
> Thee, Serpent, suttlest beast of all the field
> I knew, but not with human voice endu'd;
> Redouble then this miracle and say,
> How cam'st thou speakable of mute?
>
> (PL 9.553–63)

The marvellous neologism "speakable" both suggests what makes evil itself so attractive and helps to answer, from within the terms of the poem itself, the problem posed by the *unimaginability* of hate in Heaven. Between the two episodes of listening to the angel and the Devil, Eve has come a long way—into a new, subtle kind of discourse.

At the moment of Satan's self-invention, it was both Sin itself, but also the Sign (or at least one very powerful aspect of signification), that came into being. When Satan meets his allegorical daughter at the gates of Hell, Sin tells him the story of her own origin and so reminds him of his own. The passage recalls the birth of Athena to Zeus:

[39] *Paradise Lost* 7.241, 251, 262, 269. See Sanford Budick, *The Dividing Muse: Images of Sacred Disjunction in Milton's Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

> Then shining heav'nly fair, a Goddess arm'd
> Out of thy head I sprung: amazement seis'd
> All th' host of Heav'n; back they recoild affraid
> At first, and call'd me *Sin*, and for a Sign
> Portentous held me.
>
> (PL 2.757–61)

Milton is clearly playing with the sounds here, and he was more than capable of speculating about the etymology of "Sin," in the way that Skeat (the great nineteenth-century philologist, student of Old English, and one of the minds present in that remarkable work of scholarship, the *OED*) does: "AS *synne* represents . . . an Idg (Indo germanic) type . . . *sont*. It is the abstract sb. allied to L. *sons* (stem *sonti-*), sinful, guilty, orig. 'being.' real; and Curtius refers this (along with Icel. *sannr*, true, very, Goth. *sunja*, the truth, sooth) to the root ES, to be; remarking that . . . language regards the guilty man as the man who it was."[40] He further connects it with the present participle of the Greek verb "to be," *eont-*, *eōn*, *esōn*, being. The link is perhaps most obvious in the case of the modern German *sein*.

Milton's pun goes in a different direction, not towards being but towards meaning. "All signs emerge from sin [which] is the precondition . . . of the sign," says R. A. Shoaf.[41] Sin is named by the angels, and they are right that she is a portent, or something monstrous. But this naming of Sin, to make the pun with "sign," is arbitrary, shifting language from a natural to a merely artificial or customary basis. There is no cognizance, only coincidence, in the pun. From now on that is how language will mean. That was exactly why Aristotle objected to verbal ambiguity in the *Rhetoric*.[42] He wanted words to be clearer and more fixed than that. Milton, though, exploits them for the profoundly unsettling quality they can have.

9. *Evil Eve*

Nor does the word "evil" itself escape this labyrinth of language. And here the pun is insidious and goes to the heart of what Milton is doing in the poem. The English word "evil" is of Teutonic origin, cognate with *übel* and Dutch

[40] Skeat, *Etymological Dictionary*, p. 563.

[41] R. A. Shoaf, *Milton, Poet of Duality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 23–59. Leonard objects to this, saying it is not all signs, or the sign, but only a sign, that is at issue; *Naming*, pp. 166–68.

[42] Aristotle seems to have a special dislike for *homonymia* and *amphibola*, since they violate that fundamental virtue that he calls *hellenismos*; that is, clarity, *sapheneia*. *Rhetoric* II, 24, 1401a 13–23, III, 2, 1404b 35–40, III, 5, 1407a 33–b 5. Cf. the briefer reference at *Poetics* 22, 1458a 18, to which the text of the *Rhetoric* refers. What Aristotle objects to, it seems obvious, is Sophism. See the splendid discussion in W. Bedell Stanford's unjustly neglected *Ambiguity in Greek Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1939), pp. 6–34. It is true that Aristotle defends Homer from the charge of using puns (*Rhet*. 3.11, 1412a 33–36), but that only goes to show how little real sympathy he had with the multivalence of poetic language.

euvel. It is thought to derive from a theoretical word **ubiloz*, cognate with "up" or "over," and thus the etymology of "evil" connects it with the concepts of "too much," "exceeding due measure," "over limits," what used to be thought of as "hubris." It thus means what Satan speaks of when chatting with Eve—"ventring higher then my Lot" (9.690)—and the idea echoes through the subsequent dialogue. The *OED* has various definitions, but the important distinction is between those uses that are synonyms of "weakness" or "affliction," and those that retain the much stronger sense that makes people reluctant to use it, restricting it to the Nazi holocaust or similarly extreme events such as the genocides in Rwanda or Kosovo; this strong sense of "evil," far from being obsolete when used of people,[43] is reserved for those who are barely regarded as human. In *Paradise Lost* the word is used in this strong sense. Satan is called, but only once, "the Evil one" (9.463). And as we just saw, it is used for Hell.

But "evil" is also linked with a word that sounds and looks like it, but that has no etymological relation, a word that comes from Hebrew, "Eve." And through the relation Milton dramatizes one of the key themes of the poem. The real problem for men and women, Milton thinks, is not the world as created by God and perverted by Satan, but each other. Sexual difference is the best thing about the world, and the worst. In particular, as the poem demonstrates many times, Eve's feeling of inequality, of belatedness, is what Satan has to exploit. And the word "evil," at least in Adam's mind, and so in ours, is linked to his wife's name. "O *Eve*, in evil hour thou didst give eare / To that false Worm" (9.1067–68). As Ricks puts it, Adam "proclaims that the word evil is derived from Eve, and that evil derives from her."[44]

Nevertheless Milton makes one very important distinction between his version of the story and the one common in the tradition. This relation of Eve to evil was solidified, for speakers of English at least, because she received that name in Genesis only after the Fall. But in *Paradise Lost* she is called Eve before the Fall: indeed Adam's first desperate words to her are "Return faire *Eve*" (4.481), when they have not been introduced and when he ought, by his own version of the story, to call her "Woman" (8.496, "Woman is her Name"). The angel Raphael calls her Eve at 8.172.[45] And the name itself has an inherent meaning. At 11.159–69, for example, Eve is "rightly call'd, Mother of all Mankind, / Mother of all things living," whereupon she talks ironically of her name: "That I who first brought Death on all, am grac't / The sourse of life." Eve's name (*Chava*) is cognate with hebrew *chai*, life, which accounts for Genesis 3.20: "And Adam called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother

[43] David Pocock, "Unruly evil," in David Parkin, ed., *The Anthropology of Evil* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), p. 52.

[44] Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style*, p. 103. Cf. 9.780–81: "So saying, her rash hand in evil hour / Forth reaching to the Fruit, she pluck'd, she eat."

[45] Leonard, *Naming*, pp. 35–36. For further wordplay with Eve's name, see chap. 7, n. 13, below.

of all living." There is thus no inherent connection between "Eve" and "evil," only an accidental similarity that Adam seizes on in the first heat of his fallen reaction. The similarity, like that of "Sin" and "sign," requires all readers at least to think through the issue again, and perhaps distinguish between accidental and essential parallels.

Before the Fall, Adam had been as perplexed as a classical philosopher about hate in heaven or the source of evil: following her dream, he tells his wife, without knowing Satan was behind it, that "This uncouth dream, [was] of evil sprung I fear" (5.98). This far his prelapsarian insight can take him. Yet no further, for he cannot answer the question, his variant of Augustine's "unde malum?", that he then poses: "Yet evil whence? in thee can harbour none" (5.99). That he can later change his mind and make the Eve/evil pun suggests how serious is the problem he now faces. But it no more answers the question than his earlier innocence can.

It is only when he finally puts together everything Eve has told him with God's prediction about the serpent's head and bruises that he can see what has happened, and whence this evil:

> thy Seed shall bruise
> The Serpents head; piteous amends, unless
> Be meant, whom I conjecture, our grand Foe
> *Satan*, who in the Serpent hath contriv'd
> Against us this deceit: to crush his head
> Would be revenge indeed.
>
> (PL 10.1031–36)

So he finally realizes that the serpent was Satan. He had supposed before that "som cursed fraud / Of Enemie hath beguil'd thee, yet unknown" (9.904–5), but he now makes the key move anticipated by the poem's opening question and answer ("Who first seduc'd them . . . ? Th' infernal Serpent"; 1.33–34), and realizes the meaning of the story he is living out.[46] He has made the connection that is evident to readers of classical epic. Human and divine levels of action intertwine, so that quarrels among men set off or extend similar quarrels among the gods. In Vergil snakes infect Allecto's victims—but none of them know it. In Milton the main character has worked out the supernatural source of the infection for himself.

10. *Openings*

Milton's opening question to his Muse imitates Homer's "What god was it that set them to conflict?" (*Iliad* 1.8), which is immediately answered: Apollo's

[46] Georgia Christopher is right to make this the turning point of the poem in *Science*, pp. 163–72. It is when the promise of redemption is recalled, and so begins to work. See chap. 10, below. For Adam's progressive understanding of the combat myth, see the Conclusion, below.

anger at the king is what drove the pestilence among the people. Just so Milton's question is instantly answered ("Who first seduc'd them . . . ? Th' infernal Serpent"; 1.33–34). Yet when we put the texts so baldly together side by side, the difference leaps out at us. In one case the answer is clear and unambiguous, and applies only to the local quarrel of Agamemnon and Achilles. But Milton's answer, while it clearly introduces supernatural agency, does not name the being in spite of that straightforward question "Who?" The answer invites a further question ("and who is that?") and thus requires the reader both to anticipate Adam's insight in Book 10, and to repeat the long process of linking images and proof-texts that had constructed the basic doctrines of Christianity in the early years of the Church. And in the process to face the problem of evil.

Commentators here cite Revelation 12.9, "that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world," and they are right to do so. Yet that old serpent was not infernal, at least not at that point: he was cast out, as the grand dragon, but "into the earth," and his angels with him. It is only at Revelation 20.1–3 that he (no mention of his angels) is bound in the abyss. You might add several other texts to construct a complete picture of this event, including the Isaiah 14 passage discussed earlier, in which Lucifer tries to be like the most high, but is brought down to Hell. Milton's story is both a reconstruction of the events, and of the relevant texts, but what is most peculiar about this version is that he withholds the name "Satan" as the answer to his opening question, and offers that name only 49 lines later, at line 82.

You might say, well, there is no question about the identity of the serpent. He had been thoroughly identified by Origen and Augustine long before, using the same proof-texts. But in fact the story is so diffused throughout the Bible (and indeed, never explicitly there at all), that it had been variously told and reconstructed. For most Renaissance poets, for example, the name of this hero was Lucifer rather than Satan, and there is nothing to parallel Milton's careful deployment of those two names as the before and after of the rebellion. In some accounts they are even different figures.[47] Nor is there any agreement about the transformation of Lucifer into serpent: for many this happened when he was cast into the pit.[48] Thus it may still have been something of a surprise for Milton's first readers (afraid, like Marvell, that he would "ruin . . . the sacred Truths to Fable and old Song")[49] to discover Satan still an angel in Hell when he has been announced as an infernal serpent.

When he does appear, indeed, there is at first considerable doubt about his appearance—and, as we saw in chapter 2, he shares that doubt himself. Not only is he uncertain who his companion is, since he is so "chang'd / From

[47] See Taubmann as cited in Revard, *War in Heaven*, p. 224.

[48] Ibid, p. 229. The process of naming this being is carefully studied in Leonard, *Naming*.

[49] Marvell, "On *Paradise Lost*," 7–8, printed with the 1674 edition; see Flannagan, (RM, n. 2, p. 350).

him, who in the happy Realms of Light . . . didst out-shine / Myriads though bright" (1.84–87), but he is in fact, we eventually discover, "Prone on the Flood" (1.195), with just his "Head up-lift above the wave"; that is, in the very posture of a serpent. Indeed these lines are modeled on Vergil's description of the sea-serpents in the Laocoon episode.[50] No doubt they anticipate the later and explicit metamorphosis of Satan back to a serpent at 10.504–56, but on a first reading the lines may well suggest that this is the actual appearance of the infernal serpent, especially since a winding monster simile (Briareos, Typhon, and Leviathan) now intervenes. The word "Angel," it is true, occurs first in line 38, but for his Army, not himself; he views "as far as Angels kenn" at line 59; line 125 identifies him as an apostate angel, but that may be his status rather than his appearance. Only when he rears upright (221) does Satan's mighty size become apparent, his wings expand (225), but dragons have wings, and eventually his feet are mentioned as they reach land. His angelic appearance is confirmed by the shoulders on which his shield hangs like the moon (287), and by the spear he walks with to support his steps (295). But the word itself is applied to Satan himself only after the long catalog of the other angels, when he stands like a tower above them all and we finally hear that "his form had not yet lost / All her Original brightness, nor appear'd / Less then Arch Angel ruind" (1.591–93). What has been happening throughout this long sequence, then, is that the reader's experience of Satan has been transformed backwards, as it were, from an infernal serpent to a heroic angel. And it is in that form that he initiates the action of the poem by his proposals during the council scene. It is also in that form that he will appear to Eve in her dream and tempt her to eat the fruit of the tree.[51] So when he reappears as a serpent, it is no wonder she does not identify him.

All this is a long and complex answer to that straightforward Homeric question. Why, we may wonder, did Milton not simply use Vergil's more complex variant? The answer is that Vergil changed too much of his Homeric

[50] Compare "pectora quorum inter fluctus arrecta iubaeque / sanguineae superant undas; pars cetera pontum / pone legit" and "ardentisque oculos suffecti," *Aeneid* 2.206–10. Fowler ad loc notes the parallel, and Flannagan thinks Satan is actually "a sea-serpent here, modeled after the sea-serpents in the *Aeneid* swimming toward Laocoon: 'Rampant they were among the waves, their blood-red crests / Reared up over the water; the rest of them slithered along'" in C. Day Lewis's translation, 2.16–18 (RM, n. 72, p. 360).

[51] On the outside, though, he appears squat like a toad (4.800). The problem of Satan's appearance is emphasized in that passage: at the touch of Ithuriel's spear he starts up "in his own shape" (4.819), the wonderful simile that defers this moment is about a sudden explosion that "inflames the Aire," and then he is described, to the view of the two guardian angels, as "the grieslie King." They do not know him, however, and this occasions his marvellous line: "Not to know mee argues your selves unknown" (4.830). At which point the angels explain, as he had admitted himself earlier (1.97), that his shape has changed. Satan is "abasht" to "find here observd / His lustre visibly impar'd" (4.846–50). John Guillory, *Poetic Authority*, goes as far as to argue from this passage that "we can never manage to see the 'thing itself' (p. 149).

model. Juno is still there in the same narrative slot as the instrumental cause of Aeneas's sufferings. But she is not there as an answer to a question. When the question to the Muse comes, as it immediately does, it is not about the story, but about the reasons for it. What is the reason for Juno's anger? And then comes another question, even more general and reflective, this time posed directly, whether to the Muse or the reader, and not directly answered: "tantaene animis caelestibus irae?" (Is there [can there be?] such anger in the minds of the gods?) (*Aeneid* 1.11).[52] The narrative then begins, as an answer to the earlier question (line 4) about Juno's anger: it turns out to be her hopes for Carthage that make her angry with the Trojans, and also her fury at Paris because of his preference for Venus in the apple contest. This larger question about the nature of the gods is answered, if at all, by the whole poem—and there are many episodes, from the destruction of Troy to Turnus, that tell us the answer is "Yes."

Of course Milton *has* used Vergil's method, for indeed it is his entire narrative that answers the initiating question. And he also used Vergil's questions. The simple Homeric question, "Who?", is itself, in Milton's text, embedded as an answer to a question, like Vergil's to the Muse ("Musa, mihi causas memora"; 1.8), "say first what cause / Mov'd our Grand Parents . . . to fall off?" (1.28–30). So Milton, like Vergil, doubles the questions. The Vergilian question, "what cause?", is answered by the further Homeric question, "Who?", which in turn is answered by "th' infernal Serpent." And the narrative can begin, with Satan as the answer to the question, an answer that in turn poses so many further questions that only mythological narrative can answer them. It is a relief, given the complexities that thus arise, that Milton does not here imitate that further Vergilian question, "Is there such anger in the minds of the gods?"

11. *"Perverse"*

Elsewhere, though, Milton does translate this question into his poem, twice in fact, and on both occasions it carries powerful allusive meaning. Satan himself quotes it at the climax of his successful temptation of Eve, as a way to convince the innocent woman that God could not possibly have meant to deny her the fruit of the tree: "is it envie, and can envie dwell / In heav'nly brests?" (9.729–30). It is his final argument, and so obviously requires the answer "No" that Satan needs to say no more. The irony is clear: Satan's is exactly that kind of "heav'nly brest," as the reader has long known since the infernal serpent's primary sin was designated Envy at 1.35. If poor Eve had read Vergil she would know that the correct answer is "Yes." Complicity between the edu-

[52] See Mario A. Di Cesare, *The Altar and the City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), p. 3.

cated reader and Satan is nowhere more obvious or more disturbing in the face of this primal innocence.

The other allusion to the question about Juno's anger is for the mini–war epic at the heart of the poem. "In heav'nly Spirits could such perverseness dwell?" (6.788), Milton (or Raphael?) asks parenthetically as the Satanic forces rally for a further assault. Here, too, the reference is obvious to all readers, yet from Vergil's *ira* to Milton's "perverseness" is a large step. *Ira* is a pure emotion, anger, even if we recall the *dies irae* to which it gives name in the Judeo-Christian tradition. But "perverseness" implies a double-perspective, the typical "before" and "after" split that the Christian idea of the Fall promotes. Something that previously was a positive quality (though we do not know what it may have been; perhaps that same pure anger), is now irremediably changed. It is turned (*vertere*) completely (*per-*) in a new and unsavoury direction.[53] The real precedents for that concept are not in Vergil, still less in Homer, but in the Judeo-Christian literature.

That is not to say that the word "perverse" does not itself appear in Vergil. Indeed it occurs at the end of the Allecto story, as we have seen. What is more, Vergil there intervenes, like Milton here, to condemn the war that Juno and Allecto begin. He ascribes it to *perverso numine* (*Aen.* 7.583–84). Milton obviously recalled that passage at this key moment in the war (the Messiah is about to intervene and chase the rebels down to Hell), since there are parallel omens in Heaven, ignored by the rebels, whose hearts, like Pharaoh's troops, are hardened:

> In heav'nly Spirits could such perverseness dwell?
> But to convince the proud what Signs availe,
> Or Wonders move th' obdurate to relent?
> They hard'ned more.
>
> (PL 6.788–91)

And Milton invites the comparison, as often, to bring home the difference from Vergil. Milton's story is not about the local power of a malign influence, or *numen*, as in Roman religion, but the rebel angels initiating the archetype of all wars at the beginning of time and history as we know it. And the hardening of their hearts is a specific and fundamentally Christian religious doctrine. Indeed, Milton explains it at some length in his theological treatise: "Hardening of the heart is usually the last punishment inflicted on inveterate wickedness and unbelief in this life . . . God often hardens the hearts of powerful and

[53] Flannagan (RM, n. 160, p. 399) explores the implications of "perverse," when it appears as a keyword in Hell ("Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things"; 2.625). But like many commentators at this and other points, he needs to exonerate God in the face of the poem's ambivalence, and quotes the theological Milton to do so: Milton found it "intolerable and incredible that evil should be stronger than good and should prove the true supreme power" (*De doctrina Christiana* 1.2 [YP 6.131]).

arrogant world leaders . . . Thus Pharaoh is said to harden his heart."[54] Modern parallels for these world leaders will spring readily to mind. And this self-infliction of damnation is what is dramatized in the wonderful soliloquy of Satan on Mount Niphates (4.32–113). That kind of perverseness is not what Vergil means.

12. *Odium Dei*

A few lines later come those wondering doubts of the innocent audience, "filled with Admiration and deep Muse," which we may hear now as a further variant on Vergil's famous question: could there be such hate in heaven? The answer is quite simply "Yes," however unimaginable to Adam and Eve. Despite his expressed reluctance to reproduce the subjects of classical epic, Milton constantly uses its terms and language to complicate his own. The wrath of stern Achilles, the rage of Turnus, the ire of Juno, supposedly left behind by the Miltonic narrator (9.14–18), are all here again in the celestial battle, in the "wrauth" of the Son at 6.826, or of God at 6.59, and the problem for many readers is that, in spite of the claims in the invocation to Book 9, their wrath is not different from that of their predecessors. As Sin tells her incestuous son Death, God "laughs the while / At thee ordain'd his drudge, to execute / What e're his wrath, which he calls Justice, bids" (2.731–33). In these cases classical epic genuinely contaminates the effort of the Christian poet to transcend his medium. Juno's ire, or the more general *animis caelestibus irae*, is reproduced not only in Satan's resentment, but in the "wrauth awak't" of God, giving off smoke and flame in "dusky wreathes" (even at this moment Milton cannot resist a pun).[55]

> So spake the Sovran voice, and Clouds began
> To darken all the Hill, and smoak to rowl
> In duskie wreathes, reluctant flames, the signe
> Of wrauth awak't.
>
> (PL 6.56–59)

The Christian poet might have wanted God's wrath to be utterly other than Achilles' and Juno's or Neptune's, just as the word "perverse" resonates so differently, but if so, he brought that well-known biblical emotion dangerously close to the classical: indeed the passage that reduces classical epic to varieties of anger (as Flannagan well mentions [RM, n. 13, p. 584]) follows by only four

[54] *De doctrina Christiana* 1.8 (YP 6336–37).

[55] Indeed, there may be a triple pun here, since "reluctant" means "writhing," *OED* 1, as both Fowler and Leonard explain ad loc. Flannagan (RM, n. 23, p. 509) ignores them and says that "the flames are reluctant because they, as they are personified, hesitate to proclaim the terror of God's wrath." Leonard points out that this modern sense of the word, *OED* 2b, is in any case a Miltonic coinage.

lines his statement about God's "Anger and just rebuke, and judgement giv'n" (9.10). Putting biblical and classical so closely together must mean that we are to think them together, just as we must with "hate in Heav'n."[56]

Indeed even that hate, Satanic as it is, is also divine. What Adam and Eve in fact are reacting to, in the narrator's summary of their "admiration and deep Muse" (7.52), is not only what God calls "Hellish hate" (3.298), but also his own, and his Son's. To end the War in Heaven, which God calls "this perverse Commotion," he tells the Son to get out his chariot and drive out "these sons of Darkness" from heaven into "the utter Deep" (6.706–16). To which the Son agrees, and says "whom thou hat'st, I hate, and can put on / Thy terrors, as I put thy mildness on, / Image of thee in all things" (6.734–36). Christ is quoting Psalm 139.21–22, "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? . . . I hate them with perfect hatred," and also Romans 9.13 where God is said to hate the reprobate.[57] Thus it may be true that in the overall structure of the poem's plot and its theology, as God says, "So Heav'nly love shall outdoo Hellish hate / Giving to death, and dying to redeeme, / So dearly to redeem what Hellish hate / So easily destroy'd" (3.298–301). But here at the center of the poem, at the very moment when Christ mounts his chariot to anticipate and symbolize all his further triumphs, from the Resurrection to the ascension itself to the final battle, hate itself is heavenly.

In this chapter, we have seen that, though the poem is about the origin of evil, both in Heaven and on Earth, the medium through which the representation of evil is worked out is primarily Satan, and most of the words are linked to him. But he is not himself identical with evil. To be sure, he is the answer to the initiating question, both in the narrative and philosophical senses. Hell is created evil for him, and he it is who affects, and infects, the consciousness of Eve (first the dream, then his "speakable" rhetoric), and then, via Eve, Adam (who never meets him). In the moral sense, however, he is not responsible for human evil, since if man is free, what can that mean if he is not himself the

[56] The question of God's anger is discussed and excused by Burden, *Logical*, pp. 11–12, 34–38. Cf. McMahon, *Two Poets*, pp. 56–57. The language of the 1662 Prayer Book unequivocally inserts God's wrath in a Satanic sequence: "From all evil and mischief; from sin, from the crafts and assaults of the devil; from thy wrath, and from everlasting damnation, Good Lord, deliver us."

[57] Michael Lieb, "'Hate in Heaven'": 519–39, brings together the various passages, together with Calvin and other commentators relevant to Milton. These include Lactantius, whose treatise *De ira dei* (see n. 7, above) argued for a God who can both love and hate (1.5–8.32). Lieb is rightly critical of those who would minimize this aspect of the biblical God, but he also links the hatred manifest in the chariot scene with the "divorcing command" of God, whereby the Creation is enacted, from the same chariot, in the next book. Indeed the two scenes form an important and balanced pair at the center of the poem, but the emotions they display are, I judge, radically different. David Loewenstein, *Milton and the Drama of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 20–25, stresses the angry side of Milton's political voice, repeating "Gods just anger," especially in his *An Apology for Smectymnuus*.

cause of his own sin? Satan is merely the proximate cause. And as I argued in the Introduction, his damnation is the occasion for mankind's redemption. As we saw in chapter 4, despite his own disclaimers and the narrator's insistent ambivalence, in his emotional prison he is the dominant image of what damnation might feel like. That is the poem's real Hell, but it, too, like the physical Hell discussed here, is imposed by God. Above all, we have now seen, the link to Satan goes through hate, and what is very hard to fathom, "hate in Heav'n." That hate is his, and he makes it ours. But it is also both Milton's God's and the Christian's. As usual, Satan expresses and performs what is already God's, and Milton shows him doing so.

SEVEN

OF MANS FIRST DIS

> *Disdain* forbids me, and my dread of shame
> Among the spirits beneath, whom I seduc'd
> —PL 4.82–83

In the last chapter, I analyzed some of the words for "evil" that Milton deploys in strategic ways throughout the poem. Now it is time to notice that, beyond the specific words that "mean" evil or Satan, there is a network of echoing sounds and words that extends and complicates the Satanic focus of the epic. And it begins at the beginning. That remarkable forward shift of stresses in the opening pentameter of *Paradise Lost* places special emphasis on the first syllable of the long word "disobedience."

> Of **Mans First Disobe**dience and the **Fruit**
> (PL 1.1; emphasis mine)

The sound of the line initiates a series of *calembours* that makes the announced subject of the poem not simply the moral offence of "disobedience," important as Milton wants that to be, but a more fundamental issue, one that reaches into the roots of language: it is about DIS and what it signifies.

Milton was fond of using or making up negative words beginning with "dis—." Several such words have Milton as the first citation in the *OED*, which suggests that at least some he invented: examples are "disfigurement" (*Comus* 74), "disally" (*Samson Agonistes* 1022), "displode" (PL 6.605), and even "discontinuous" (6.329).[1] In fact, he pushes the wordplay so far that an apparently neutral term like "discourse" is drawn into the pattern of meanings, and so, too, is the power of making distinctions through which Milton figures God's creative Word.[2] One result is that he makes it that much harder to tell God from Satan, and his serious play infects even his own discourse. I shall first explore the network of prefixes in the poem, with comments on the various words and the pressures exerted by their etymologies, then establish the connection with Satan, and finally see what difference it all makes.

[1] James Gray, "Milton and the *OED* as Electronic Database," *Milton Quarterly* 23 (1989): 66–73. Throughout this chapter, boldface emphasis is mine.

[2] Budick, *The Dividing Muse*. He also shows how Satan tries to *con*fuse, and makes a link with Ramism. See also Shoaf, *Duality*, pp. 25, 154–68.

1. *Dis—*

Christopher Ricks in some of his most memorable paragraphs pointed to the accumulation of front-rhymes on "dis—" in the opening lines of Book 9,[3] the book of the Fall itself.

> No more of talk where God or Angel Guest
> With Man, as with his Friend, familiar us'd
> To sit indulgent, and with him partake
> Rural repast, permitting him the while
> Venial **discourse** unblam'd: I now must change
> Those Notes to Tragic; foul **distrust**, and breach
> **Disloyal** on the part of Man, revolt,
> And **disobedience**: On the part of Heav'n
> Now alienated, **distance** and **distaste**.
>
> (PL 9.1–9; emphasis mine)

The first word in this echoing series is the apparently harmless "discourse," embedded in a phrase that asserts its innocence, "Venial discourse unblam'd," and pointing back as the foil of a priamel to the friendly chat just ended with Raphael.[4] The line then completes itself after the colon, one of the strongest caesurae in the poem, by looking forward: "I now must change / Those Notes to Tragic." Nevertheless, the subsequent piling up of "sinful" "dis—" words threatens to reach back across the chasm of the caesura and contaminate that innocent "discourse," anxiously flanked and protected though it is by "venial" and "unblamed." Indeed, the whole sequence (and so the whole of Book 9) is introduced with the negative: "No more," specifically "No more of talk." And "*Lavinia* disespous'd" soon follows in line 17, another Miltonic neologism that marks an important theme of the poem and suggests one more potential parallel with Eve.

Ricks made nothing of the anxiety about "discourse" here, and that is an interesting measure of what has become available to critical perception in the past forty years. But he did note the special effect of the "brilliantly unspoken pun" on "distaste," aligned on the one hand with "distance" and meaning something like "revulsion," and on the other hand with the poem's constant reiteration of the Fall as the "tasting" of the apple: "On the part of man, taste; on the part of Heaven, distaste." Here, too, I think we might now extend the reach of this pun if we shift our sights from "taste" to "dis—": the subject, after all, is the archetype of human alienations, the original separation. The

[3] Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style*, pp. 69–72.

[4] The rhetorical device known as the "priamel" highlights a point of interest by setting it against a background (foil) of other items to which it is preferred. See Elroy L. Bundy, *Studia Pindarica*, University of California Publications in Classical Philology, Vol. 18.1–2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, [1962] 1986).

functions of the puns on "par—" have been thoroughly explored by R. A. Shoaf (especially: "part," "apart," "separate," and "pair," "impair," "repair"),[5] and they reinforce and extend the poem's wordplay on "dis—" that, in this passage, gets its basic meaning stated: "breach."

The etymology of the prefix "dis—" lies in the Indo-European words for "two." It is related to Greek *dis*, "twice," and its basic meaning (according to the *OED*) is "two-ways, in twain," and hence "apart," "asunder," or "separate." The Greek prefix *dia—* has a similar origin, as in "dialogue" or "diabolic."[6] In English the vowel of the "dis—" prefix is normally short, but in French, through which some words passed into English in the Middle Ages (e.g., *descant*), it is lengthened (French *désaccord*, but English "discord"), and in Italian the vowel is always long. Sometimes, the "s" is assimilated, as in "different," or it disappears, as in "divide." In Latin, and so in English, compound words in "dis—" are frequently the opposite of words in "con—", as in *discordia concors*. The prefix often has a privative, negative, or reversive force, as in "displease," "dissuade," or "disaster," in which sense, and given the vagaries of English spelling, it picks up the flavor of the unrelated Greek prefix *dys—*, meaning "unlucky" or "ill—," as in *dysdaemon*, "unhappy," or in English "dysentery," "dyspeptic," or (a modern coinage on the ancient medical model) "dyslexia." Milton exploits this possibility for "disastrous twilight," that is, "ill-starred," in the lines that Charles II's censor found subversive (1.594–99). In this negative or privative sense "dis—" remains a living prefix, having a readily understood meaning and generating new compounds such as "disestablish" (a sixteenth-century formation), "disrobe," or "disable."

In this sense also, via the "des—" form common to the Romance languages, there occurs some overlapping with another prefix, "de—," so that Latin *dearmare* becomes in Old French *des-armer*, but "disarm" in English.[7] Thus to our family of words belongs Adam's horrified and profound exclamation after the Fall:

> How art thou lost, how on a sudden lost,
> Defac't, deflourd, and now to Death devote?
>
> (PL 9.900–901)

Each of these words has its pun, reaching back for and playing on the literal meanings. To get the theological implications of "defaced" Arnold Stein cited a definition of sin in *De doctrina Christiana* 1.12 that includes the phrase "the

[5] Shoaf, *Duality*, esp. p. 197, n. 54. Compare "disparage and displace" at PL 1.473.

[6] See Richmond Lattimore, "Why the Devil is the Devil," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 106 (1962): 427–29, and Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, pp. 4–5, for the etymology of *diabolos* and "devil."

[7] See "de—" 6 in the *OED*. "Defeat" on the other hand, comes from Latin *dis—* + *facere*, to undo, via Old French *des—* and the later French adaptation to *defait*. Contrast "defect," which comes direct from Latin, and from *de—* + *facere*.

lessening of the majesty of the human countenance,"[8] and Ricks neatly linked the human loss of face with the loss of God's face.[9] And if we hear Adam saying "defac't" to Eve, it connects with the moment when he met her at the tree, and with her newfound hypocrisy (i.e., "actor's language," Gk. *hypokrites*, actor):

> in her face excuse
> Came Prologue, and Apologie to prompt,
> Which with bland words at will she thus addrest.
> (PL 9.853–55)

Eve's speech is rounded off with the standard epic formula:

> Thus *Eve* with Countnance blithe her storie told;
> But in her Cheek distemper flushing glowd.
> (PL 9.886–87)

"Distemper" means here both a physical and mental disorder; as Fowler notes, it is "a disturbance of the temperament of the bodily humours," but it is also the "intoxication" from which she is temporarily suffering. Indeed the word picks up much of the range of related *tempus* words in the European languages (from "tempest" to "temper" to "temporary" to "time").

On "deflourd" Fowler comments oddly: "Primarily metaphorical, though in a literal sense it would apply to the suggested seduction of Eve by Satan." The "metaphorical" sense is surely the one that implies the sexual seduction of Eve: the "literal" is that Satan had initially taken Eve to the tree from among her flowers. And now she has, as Flannagan points out, lost her Garden (RM, n. 258, p. 612). Of course, the sexual implications, as in the line "This Flourie Plat, the sweet recess of *Eve*" (9.456), are never far away. "Devote," too, has a range of meanings: in its Latin sense it means "dedicated to a god by a vow," and here the god is both Death and the tree, to which Eve has just done "low reverence" (cf. "devout"),[10] so the word takes on the idea of "cursed." But since the sixteenth century "devotion" has also had the secular meaning of enthusiastic attachment, which suggests betrothal, and so betrayal of Adam with a second husband, Death—a close relative of Satan's.

One other word deserves to be brought into this set. When Satan returns to Hell, he claims that "Man I deceav'd" (10.496): several other occurences of

[8] Arnold Stein, *Answerable Style: Essays on "Paradise Lost"* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1953), p. 8: compare "discount'nanc't" in 8.553, discussed below. See YP 6.394, where Kelley's note cites PL 9.1077–78: "And in our Faces evident the signes / Of foul concupiscence."

[9] Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style*, 140; see also 9.1080–82, "How shall I behold the face / Henceforth of God or Angel, earst with joy / And rapture so oft beheld?". Budick, *Dividing Muse*, p. 73, suggests "defaced" could also refer to Milton's blindness. "Deface" comes from *dis—* + *facies*, via OF *desfacier*, but "deflower" comes from *de—* + *flos*, as in LL *deflorare*; but cf. OF *desflorir*.

[10] Compare 3.207–9, "To expiate his Treason hath naught left, / But to destruction sacred and devote, / He with his whole posteritie must dye."

the word in this context suggest that Milton was conscious of the pun that the sound makes, linking "de—" and "dis—" words in "dis-Eved." In *Paradise Regain'd*, Satan even seems to exploit the pun himself: you know, he says to his fellow devils, how many ages we have reigned on earth,

> Since *Adam* and his facil consort *Eve*
> Lost Paradise deceav'd by me
>
> (PR 1.51–52)[11]

Both Adam and Paradise have thus been deprived of Eve.

To sum up, then, "de—" or "dis—" are insistently the results of the Fall. The range of these words defines one of the informing plots of *Paradise Lost*, its Satanic movement from unity to separation and discord. The word "disobedience," we may conclude, can carry such moral freight, however colorless it may seem, because Milton stands all these other words behind it.

2. *Satan's "dark suggestions"*

It is indeed Satan himself who makes the most explicit play with a pun on "dis—". The word "discharge" forms part of a smirking string of puns on the newly invented artillery (including: "overture": 1. open; 2. opening of negotiations or music; 3. hole or bore of the canon; "touch": already used three times before; and "loud"). What makes these puns so tiresome is the schoolboy knowingness that one hears in the speaking voice; one imagines the other devils tittering as the clever Satan delivers his taunting double-entendres:

> Vanguard, to Right and Left the Front unfould
> That all may see who hate us, how we seek
> Peace and composure, and with open brest
> Stand readie to receive them, if they like
> Our overture, and turn not back perverse;
> But that I doubt, however witness Heav'n,
> Heav'n witness thou anon, while we discharge
> Freely our part; yee who appointed stand
> Do as you have in charge, and briefly touch
> What we propound, and loud that all may hear.
>
> (PL 6.558–67)

To this level has the Satanic literalism been reduced, a crude and labored joke that depends on one meaning being missed by half of the audience. As Ricks

[11] Shoaf, *Duality*, pp. ix–xix. Leonard partially endorses this pun at 1.35–36, "deceiv'd / The Mother of Mankind." In his note on PR 1.51–52, Leonard says that "deceiv'd," (Dis-Eved) thus means "deprived of immortality," since her name means "Life."

well argues, it is the avoidance of this kind of extravagance that makes the passage at the beginning of Book 9 so effective.[12]

Actually, Satan's joke turns back on himself, as part of the intricate ironies of his soliloquy on Mount Niphates. He acknowledges there all that he was not prepared to, or not able to, admit before: he was unable, for example, to distinguish two senses of the word "owe," and therefore unable to "discharge" his "debt immense of endless gratitude":

> Forgetful what from him I still receivd,
> And understood not that a grateful mind
> By owing owes not, but still pays, at once
> Indebted and dischargd; what burden then?
>
> (PL 4.52–57)

Satan remembers enough to tell the language of the money economy from that other system, the heavenly and unified one, in which debt and payment are the same. But since the soliloquy represents what it is like to be denied "grace,"[13] he cannot any longer enjoy a "grateful" mind.

A more interesting example from the family of "dis—" words comes later in Book 9, as one of Satan's "dark suggestions" (9.90) hidden from "sharpest sight" in the "wit and native suttletie" of the serpent. As part of the temptation of Eve, Satan links food (and sex), thought and knowledge through the repetition of the word "discernment." First, in describing his supposed former state, he says:

> I was at first as other Beasts that graze
> The trodden Herb, of abject thoughts and low
> As was my food, nor aught but food **discern'd**
> Or Sex, and apprehended nothing high.
>
> (PL 9.571–74; emphasis mine)

Then the word defines the power of the tree, in one of the poem's adaptations of the Faustian tradition of forbidden knowledge:

> O Sacred, Wise, and Wisdom-giving Plant,
> Mother of Science, now I feel thy Power
> Within me cleere, not onely to **discerne**
> Things in thir Causes, but to trace the wayes
> Of highest Agents, deemd however wise.
>
> (PL 9.679–83; emphasis mine)

[12] Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style*, p. 72. Edward LeComte, *A Dictionary of Puns in Milton's English Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 45, adds "defecate" as a third meaning of "discharge." This may be right; we definitely need "defecate" as a meaning of "disburd'nd" in 6.878 after the angels have been expelled at the end of the war in heaven: "Disburd'nd Heav'n rejoic'd, and soon repaird / Her mural breach." LeComte lists twenty-five words beginning in "dis—" that Milton exploits for puns.

[13] For play with the word "grace" in the poem, see chap. 8, below.

The address to the tree and its personification as a mother already encourage Eve to move closer to it, at least in thought, and then Satan hints at the need to know "Things in thir Causes" and to question the wisdom of "the wayes / of highest Agents" (i.e., God, who has forbidden the tree) in the light of the wisdom the tree itself can give. It is not usually noticed that, though Satan is avoiding saying "God," these words also pose an implicit challenge to the voice of the narrator, who had claimed to be able to justify "the wayes of God"—and the play-rhyme on "wayes" / "wise" is typical of the Miltonic Satan's wit.

What most impresses Eve, apart from the fact that the serpent is not dead, is that he can speak. As she muses a while, reflecting on what Satan has said, she again links eating and wisdom ("intellectual food"; 9.768), and she also places Satan's word "discern" at the climax of an ascending series in which she rejects the idea of death, and in which the alliterations on "d" suggest another range of meanings:

> In the day we eate
> Of this fair Fruit, our doom is, we shall die.
> How dies the Serpent? hee hath eat'n and lives,
> And knows, and speaks, and reasons, and **discerns**,
> Irrational till then. For us alone
> Was death invented? or to us deni'd
> This intellectual food, for beasts reserv'd?
>
> (PL 9.762–68; emphasis mine)

Even as the alliteration makes a group out of "day" / "doom" / "die" / "dies,"[14] Eve's logic is in the process of separating these words from each other, and so denying God's word. The alliterative pattern completes itself with "discerns" / "death" / "denied," suggesting what Eve is really doing, or denying, beneath the surface of her thought.

In this word "discerns," then, we find both the intellectual ability to distinguish one thing from another, and also (through the idea of judgment or discrimination) criticism, even literary criticism.[15] God said, "In the day ye eat thereof, you shall surely die," and Satan has got Eve to question that text, to divide its meanings, to interpret or read it, to be her own judge or critic. Satan, as it were, has just shown himself as the first literary critic, and Eve has quickly learned to be one, too. The Greek words *krinein* (to judge) and *krisis*

[14] The sequence even suggests a bilingual pun that reinforces the divine warning, since *dies* means "day" in Latin. In modern Cockney dialect, "day" and "die," like "ways" and "wise," have the same pronunciation.

[15] See Hebrews 4.12: "For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." On the word "discerner," William Gouge adds the gloss: "we in English according to the notation of the Greek call such a one a *Critick*" (*A Learned and Very Useful Commentary on the Whole Epistle to the Hebrews* [London, 1655], p. 450, quoted in Budick, *Dividing Muse*, p. 62).

(judgment) are related to Latin *cernere*, as is the Latin *crimen* (judgment) and the English word for what, in this crisis, Eve is about to commit—"crime."

3. *Quibbles*

Thus far I have confined my argument (more or less) to the fascination of etymological exploration, a staple of modern critical commentary on Milton. But now I want to go further than what a modern philologist would place within the purview of etymology in order to explore a different kind of wordplay: likenesses of sound or other kinds of accidental similarities between words. Eighteenth-century writers and commentators, inventing a new and rigorous kind of classicism that the classical writers themselves might not have recognized tended to disapprove of wordplay, especially of this kind, as low or feminine—witness Samuel Johnson's famous stricture on Shakespeare: "a quibble was to him the fatal Cleopatra for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it."[16] Johnson disapproved equally of Milton's "play on words, in which he delights too often."[17] Milton was, we know, extremely fond of etymological wordplay, but he did not confine his delight to that restricted kind of pun. The poetic and intellectual tradition—from Plato's *Cratylus* through the Roman rhetorician Varro to Medieval and Renaissance commentators on classical and biblical texts—tended to find equally significant what our philological and neoclassical training might refer to as "mere" phonetic similarities: indeed, the two kinds of pun were not rigorously distinguished until the development of nineteenth-century historical linguistics.[18] Once we

[16] Samuel Johnson, "Preface to the Plays of William Shakespeare," in W. K. Wimsatt, ed., *Johnson on Shakespeare* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 68. Locke's condemnation of catachresis is an important stage in this development. Note especially: "Eloquence, like the fair sex, has too prevailing beauties in it to suffer itself ever to be spoken against. And it is in vain to find fault with those arts of deceiving wherein men find pleasure to be deceived." (*Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. John W. Yolton, 2 Vols. [London: Oxford University Press, 1961], Vol. 2: Bk. 3, chap. 10, p. 106). See Paul de Man, "The Epistemology of Metaphor," *Critical Inquiry* 5 (1978): 13–30. For recent discussion of Shakespearean puns, see Keir Elam, *Shakespeare's Universe of Discourse: Language Games in the Comedies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), and the essays in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, ed. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartmann (New York and London: Methuen, 1985), especially Margaret W. Ferguson, "*Hamlet*: letters and spirits," pp. 292–309.

[17] Johnson, "Life of Milton," in Shawcross, *Critical Heritage*, p. 306. Johnson also objected to "equivocations" in "Lycidas." His example is the use of shepherd for feeder of sheep and pastor! (294).

[18] For the classical tradition, see Frederick Ahl, *Metaformations: Soundplay and Wordplay in Ovid and Other Classical Poets* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); still very useful is W. B. Stanford, *Ambiguity in Greek Literature*. For the biblical and Renaissance approaches, see J. M. Sasson, "Word-play in the Old Testament," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, supp. vol., gen. ed. K. Crim (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), pp. 968–70, and Arnold Williams, *The Common Expositor* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1948), pp. 230–32: "Starting with the as-

broaden the scope of the inquiry to include this kind of wordplay, we can allow ourselves to hear that behind this collection of "dis—" words on which the poem lays such stress lurks the Roman god Dis.

Dis makes his appearance in *Paradise Lost* through the extended analogy between Eve and Proserpine. As the fatal temptation begins, Eve is tending her flowers,

> Her self, though fairest unsupported Flour,
> From her best prop so farr, and storm so nigh.
>
> (PL 9.432–33)

There is no mention of Proserpine here, but the lines recall the allusion of Book 4, the first in that prolonged negative catalogue of Paradises:

> Not that faire field
> Of *Enna*, where *Proserpin* gathering flours
> Her self a fairer Floure by gloomie *Dis*
> Was gatherd, which cost *Ceres* all that pain
> To seek her through the world.
>
> (PL 4.268–72)

The two flower-phrases linking Eve and Proserpine are among the many structural correspondences between Books 4 and 9,[19] and Milton reinforces the connection by another allusion to Ceres and Proserpine. As Eve leaves Adam's side for the last time in her innocence, Eve is compared to various Roman females whom males found irresistible, among them Diana, "*Pomona* when she fled / *Vertumnus*," and "*Ceres* in her prime, / Yet Virgin of *Proserpina* from *Jove*" (9.394–96).

The implications of this Greco-Roman myth as analogue for the Fall have been thoroughly explored by the commentators. Satan does not in fact "ravish" Eve, but their meetings are full of sexual suggestions, and one of them is this insistent overlapping with the rape of Persephone by Hades/Pluto/Dis. The chain of well-known allusions leads back through Dante and Claudian to Ovid and Vergil, eventually to the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*.[20] Milton's choice

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sumption that all languages trace back to an original unity in Hebrew, the commentators were able with ease to derive Greek and Latin words from Hebrew. In common with Renaissance scholars generally the commentators were on the whole ignorant of sound shifts and phonetic laws, and they frequently confused the sounds of a language with the symbols used in writing it." A good example is that "the word *Heden*, or Eden, is . . . both a proper name and the common noun meaning 'delight.' Pererius and Mercerus are sure that the Greek *hedone*, 'pleasure,' is derived from the Hebrew *Heden*."

[19] For extensive Derridean discussion of this pun, see Rapaport, "Milton's Lady of the Flowers," in his *Postmodern*, pp. 59–100.

[20] George deForest Lord, "Pretexts and Subtexts in 'That Fair Field of Enna'," in *Milton Studies* 20 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1984), pp. 127–46, makes the extraordinary claim that Milton must have known (or "reconstituted") the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, which survives,

of *Dis* as the name for the Satan figure in the allusion follows the dominant tendency of the tradition. Thus Perdita's famous lines evoke the flowers that Proserpina let fall from "Dis's waggon," and in the *Tempest* masque Ceres says she has foresworn the "scandaled company" of Venus and Cupid "since they did plot / The means that dusky Dis my daughter got."[21]

Dis (long vowel) is probably a contracted form of "dives" (rich). The name is thus a Latin translation of Greek *Ploutos*, which indicates a common confusion between this god of wealth and *Plouton* (Pluto), another name for Hades, the Greek king of the underworld. The confusion is encouraged by the standard overlapping of fertility concepts with the world of the dead.

> Let none admire
> That riches grow in Hell; that soyle may best
> Deserve the precious bane.
>
> (PL 1.690–92)

The evil (bane) of the present age of iron began with the mining of precious metals in *Stygiis . . . umbris*, according to the Ovidian locus classicus for this commonplace,[22] so we might be tempted to hear in this Miltonic version an allusion to the meaning (and the name) *Dis*. Yet Milton appears to suppress that possibility here: his name for the god of riches is based on the Hebrew, Mammon. Thus the Roman name *Dis*, freed as it were from its etymology, may instead associate itself with the range of "dis—" words, and with death.

In Latin literature, Dis is the principal name for the king of the shades, and two other hellish puns in *Paradise Lost* depend on Milton's consciousness of it. Satan becomes aware of his new domain, and the "dis—" words accumulate here within the "d" sounds:

> round he throws his baleful eyes
> That witness'd huge affliction and **dismay**
> Mixt with obdurate pride and stedfast hate:
> At once as far as Angels kenn he views
> The **dismal** Situation waste and wilde,
> A Dungeon horrible, on all sides round
> As one great Furnace flam'd, yet from those flames
> No light, but rather **d**arkness **vis**ible
> Serv'd onely to **discover** sights of woe,

as Lord admits, in only one manuscript and that not catalogued in Moscow until 1777. He calls the relevant passage a "dissimile," a term of which I wish I had thought. I might add that it is only since the Romantics that it has become the fashion to give the older Greek form to mythological names. Persephone, the Greek form, would also obscure the serpent in Proserpine, of which the mythographers were fond.

[21] *A Winter's Tale* 4.4.118; *The Tempest* 4.1.89.

[22] *Metamorphoses* 1.125–42; cf. Spenser, *Faerie Queene* 2.7.17.

> Regions of sorrow, **d**oleful shades, where peace
> And rest can never **d**well, hope never comes
> That comes to all; but torture without end.
>
> (PL 1.56–67; emphasis mine)

The allusion to the entrance to Dante's Hell, where "Dis" is the name both of the inner city and the principal inhabitant, makes the covert presence of "Dis" in Milton's language even more apt. But the puns here are complex: "dismay" derives from "dis—" 4 (*OED*) + "mag—" (*magan*, OHG, to be powerful), but there is no etymological link with "dismal," in spite of their proximity in Milton's text. "Dismal" comes from OF *dis* + *mal*, and this from Latin *dies mali*, unlucky or evil days.[23] In this company, "discover" carries a subsidiary suggestion of the recognition of Satan's new nature as ruler of Hell. It is no wonder, either, that Sin, whom Satan robs of her virginity to engender Death, should be "dismaid" (2.792), where Milton's spelling makes the double-pun clear.

When Satan later returns to Hell in triumph, he tells a gloating version of the story of the temptation, and his speech ends with an exhortation to his followers: "What remains, ye Gods, / But up and enter now into full bliss" (10.502–3). Expecting the standard "universal shout and high applause / To fill his eare", he hears instead "On all sides, from innumerable tongues / A dismal universal hiss, the sound / Of public scorn" (10.505–9), as his audience and he, too, are turned into snakes. In this context the full stress of this remarkable scene falls first on what is heard, and though "bliss" and "hiss" are obviously intended to rhyme by a splendid aural irony, "dismal," too, nestles up to them, and insists on being heard.

The pun on "dismal" recurs when Adam is shown the murder of one son by another:

> Death thou hast seen
> In his first shape on man; but many shapes
> Of Death, and many are the wayes that lead
> To his grim Cave, all dismal; yet to sense
> More terrible at th' entrance then within.
>
> (PL 11.466–70)

Michael's language recalls the Roman and Italian underworld quite closely, and one is surely required to hear, in Milton's alignment of death, the grim cave, and "dismal," the name of the Roman god of the dead. The words in fact translate a formulaic phrase that the chorus sings at the end of several Greek tragedies: *pollai morphai tōn daimoniōn* ("many are the shapes of the gods"). Through a multilingual pun Milton makes this "many shapes / Of Death."

[23] Le Comte lists both these puns, *Puns*, p. 46, but does not seem to notice Dis one.

4. *Vergil*

Vergil's *Aeneid* is the best place to begin exploring the Roman context. "Dis" is the name he normally gives to the king of the underworld, and the name therefore appears in those famous lines from the descent to the underworld in Book 6 that provide the framework for the subsequent poetic tradition and that are dense with quotations or allusions in Milton. The Sybil explains to Aeneas how easy it is to get into the underworld, and how hard to get out.

> facilis descensus Averno:
> noctes atque dies patet atri ianua Ditis;
> sed revocare gradum superasque evadere ad auras,
> hoc opus, hic labor est.[24]
>
> (*Aen.* 6.126–29)

> Easy the descent through Avernus: the gates of black Dis lie open night and day. But to retrace one's steps and escape to the upper air, that is the task, that is the struggle.

As in Milton, the "d" + "s" sounds make associations, this time among "Ditis," "descensus" and "dies," and the passage immediately includes Persephone, as well. To make the journey downwards possible, says the Sybil, we need the golden bough, sacred to Proserpina, queen of the underworld, since she has ordained that it be brought to her as her special offering.

In Vergil, then, Dis and Proserpina are linked as joint rulers of the shades, deities to be propitiated and addressed. Once the proper sacrifices have been made, including a sterile cow "to thee, Proserpina" (6.251), the poem makes a brief new invocation, not now to the Muses but to the mysterious and primordial deities of the underworld:

> Di, quibus imperium est animarum, umbraeque silentes
> et Chaos et Phlegethon, loca nocte tacentia late,
> sit mihi fas audita loqui, sit numine vestro
> pandere res alta terra et caligine mersas.
>
> (*Aen.* 6.264–67)

> You gods who rule over spirits, silent shades, Chaos, Phlegethon, wide realms of night and silence, let it be right for me to speak what I have heard; let it be permitted by your divine power to reveal what is buried deep in earth and darkness.

Then Dis himself is immediately mentioned, and his name picks up and completes the invocation to the "Di, quibus imperium est animarum."

Aeneas and the Sybil now find themselves walking in the underworld, in

[24] Quotations from Vergil, as before, are from the edition of R. D. Williams. Translations are my own.

the famous lines that Dante evokes for the *selva oscura* at the beginning of the *Divina Commedia*:

> Ibant obscuri sola sub nocte per umbram
> perque domos Ditis vacuas et inania regna:
> quale per incertam lunam sub luce maligna
> est iter in silvis, ubi caelum condidit umbra
> Iuppiter, et rebus nox abstulit atra colorem.
> vestibulum ante ipsum primis in faucibus Orci
> Luctus et ultrices posuere cubilia Curae.
>
> (*Aen.* 6.268–74)

> They were walking in the darkness, shadowy figures in the lonely night, through the empty homes and vacant realms of Dis, like people going through the woods by the treacherous light of a dim moon, when Jupiter has hidden the heavens in shadows and black night has taken the color out of things. At the entrance itself, in the very jaws of Hell, Grief and avenging Guilt have placed their beds.

The jaws of Hell (here called "Orcus," a Latin deity identified with Dis, and often used to mean the underworld)[25] introduce a catalog of mythological and allegorical monsters,[26] which ends appropriately enough with "Discordia demens" (6.280). A few lines later (6.309–14), Vergil and the Sybil encounter the large number of ghosts for which the simile of fallen autumnal leaves and migrating birds provides such a resonant analogy, echoing most notably in Milton's Vallombrosa allusion (PL 1.302–4).

5. *Ovid*

The presence of Vergil's language in Ovid, Milton's main source for the story of the rape of Proserpine, further complicates his reference to Dis. Ovid tells the story in two places, *Fasti* 4.417–618 and *Metamorphoses* 5.341–661.[27] In the *Metamorphoses* the story is sung by the Muse of poetry herself, Calliope, and there is then a playful allusion to this song later when her son Orpheus stands in the presence of Proserpina and her husband, "lord of the shades," and appeals for their sympathy: "vos quoque iunxit Amor" (*Met.* 10.15–29).

[25] Williams compares *Aen.* 4.242. See Milton, *Ad Patrem* 118: "Nec spisso rapient oblivia nigra sub Orco."

[26] Milton echoes the passage at, for example, PL 2.622–28. See chap. 6.6, above.

[27] See Stephen Hind, *The Metamorphosis of Persephone: Ovid and the Self-conscious Muse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). Hind assesses the importance of the Homeric Hymn and other sources, and makes an intelligent contribution to the discussion of Richard Heinze's theory that Ovid's two versions are contrasted as elegiac versus epic. Richard J. DuRocher, *Milton and Ovid* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 79–83, says that Milton used the epic *Metamorphoses* version.

Since Calliope sings in response to a challenge, her song becomes an explicit apology for poetry.[28] One of the daughters of Pieros sings about the battles of gods and giants, specifically the myth of the monster Typhoeus, another type of Satan, and how he put the gods to shame and rout. Calliope's reply wittily opens with the earthquakes caused by the struggles of Typhoeus imprisoned under Etna. Worried that his roof may spring a leak and let in the light, Dis comes out from his "tenebrosa sede" (*Met.* 5.359) to have a look around Sicily. All is well, it seems, but, before he can return to his kingdom, Venus spots him and decides to take advantage of his vulnerability to extend her power to the realm of Hell. In words that allude to and parody Vergil (as Ovid often does: it is doubly appropriate here in this Heliconian response to the epic Pierid challenge), Venus says to Cupid, her son: "arma manusque meae, mea, nate, potentia" (*Met.* 5.366), and tells him to attack. He fires an arrow and it lands in the heart of Dis.

The passage that follows, the Persephone story, is important for Milton: among other things it is a fine instance of Ovidian (and so Miltonic) sound– and wordplay. The tempo mounts until the three dental consonants at the end of a line ("-dine Ditem"; *Met.* 5.385) mark the moment of the arrow's penetration:

> ". . . iunge **deam** patruo!" **dixit** Venus, ille pharetram
> solvit et arbitrio matris de mille sagittis
> unam seposuit, sed qua nec acutior ulla
> nec minus incerta est nec quae magis au**di**at arcum,
> oppositoque genu curvavit flexile cornum
> inque cor hamata percussit harun**dine Ditem**.
> Haud procul Hennaeis lacus est a moenibus altae
> nomine Pergus, aquae: non illo plura Caystros
> carmina cygnorum labentibus au**dit in undis**.
>
> (*Met.* 5.380–88)

"Join the goddess with her uncle," said Venus, and Cupid opened his quiver. At his mother's behest he picked from his thousand arrows the sharpest and surest and most responsive to the bow. Bracing his knee he bent the bow, and the barbed shaft struck deep into the heart of Dis.

Not far from the walls of Henna lies a deep pool of water called

[28] Calliope's performance in the song-contest provided Milton with much to enrich his poem. It forms part of the context for his own self-referential remarks on the nature of his poem, such as the proem to Book 9, in particular the contrast between the long and tedious havoc of battles feigned and what his own Celestial Patroness dictates to him slumbering. For the tradition behind this repudiation of epic, beginning with Callimachus, and important in Ovid, see Hind, *Persephone*, pp. 128–31, esp. nn. 21–32, 39, 40, and p. 165, n. 34. Milton's "Descend from Heav'n, *Urania*" finds an interesting analogue in Ovid's "ad mea perpetuum deducite tempora carmen" in *Met.* 1.3–4.

Pergus. Its music rivals the songs of the swans that Cayster hears on its gliding waters.

Again the songs of the swans, in this case the Homeric swans of Cayster, alert us to the self-referential aspect of the verse. The soundplay ("audit in undis") extends itself even into the apparently peaceful description of the *locus amoenus* with its eternal spring; as the passage continues, the use of the "blows of Phoebus" ("Phoebeos . . . ictus") for the sun's rays recalls the deadlier archery of Cupid and maintains the narrative tension:[29]

> silva coronat aquas cingens latus omne, suis que
> frondibus ut velo Phoebeos submovet ictus.
> frigora dant rami, varios humus umida flores:
> perpetuum ver est. quo dum Proserpina luco
> ludit et aut violas aut candida lilia carpit,
> dumque puellari studio calathosque sinumque
> implet et aequales certat superare legendo,
> paene simul visa est **dilectaque raptaque Diti:**
> usque adeo est properatus amor.[30]
>
> (*Met.* 5.389–97)

A ring of trees girds the pool all around, and their leaves keep off the harsh rays of the sun. The branches provide cool shade, and the ground is moist with all kinds of flowers: the season is always spring. In this grove Proserpina was playing, gathering violets or white lilies. Eagerly, she filled her baskets and the folds of her robe trying to pick more than her companions. Almost in one moment she was seen, she pleased, and Dis took her up—so swift is the rush of love.

Once again the tempo is carefully managed, preparing for the suddenness of the rape by the contrast with the peaceful setting. The shock of "raptaque Diti" is further increased by the chiastic sound pair that it makes with the "dilectaque" that immediately precedes.

The whole passage provides the model for Milton's equivalent, but much longer, description of the Garden, via the list of negative parallels that begins, we recall,

[29] See Charles Segal, *Landscape in Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Wiesbaden: Hermes Einzelschriften 23, 1969), p. 54, on the sun's arrows here; see also Hind, *Persephone*, pp. 30–33.

[30] Besides the various sexual implications of flowers and laps, discussed in J. N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), pp. 90, 207, and picked up in Milton's "deflourd" (PL 9 901), the pun on Latin *paene* and *pene*, the ablative of *penis*, is obviously relevant here; it is quite common in priapic poetry, and is discussed, along with much other Ovidian wordplay, in Frederick Ahl, *Metaformations*, pp. 20–21, citing a footnote in Gibbon to show general awareness of the pun.

> Not that faire field
> Of *Enna*, where *Proserpin* gathering flours
> Her self a fairer Floure by gloomie *Dis*
> Was gatherd,
>
> (PL 4.268–71)

before we are brought back with a jolt to the point of view from which we see the Garden:

> From this *Assyrian* garden, where the Fiend
> Saw undelighted all delight.
>
> (PL 4.285–86)

Milton's play with "undelighted" we can now see as being both suggested by Ovid's "dilectaque" and as rounding off his sequence of negative comparisons by a typical ring or "aria da capo," linking back by the echo to "gloomie *Dis*" in line 270.

Ceres eventually learns what has happened to her daughter and goes to Jove to insist she be brought back. Jove's reply concludes by granting her request, on condition Proserpina has not eaten in the underworld while she was there. What is interesting in Jove's speech is that, though he is not named at this point, Dis comes into the narrative through a Jovial pun.

> sed tanta cupido
> si tibi discidii est, repetet Proserpina caelum
>
> (*Met.*, 5.530–31)

Literally what he says is "If you really have such longing to separate them, let Proserpina come to the upper world again. . ." But the words "cupido . . . discidii" playfully invoke both the name of the god who started all the trouble, Cupid, and that of Dis. They thus imply Demeter's "desire for a Dis fall" (*Dis* + *cado*), as well as for a "cutting in two" (*dis*— + *scindo*), or marital separation—a disjoining.

The plucking of the fruit shows that Proserpina is, as it were, incurable, and the pomegranate, with its incorporated pun on *poma*, apple, had already suggested to the mythographers the link with Eve.[31] Milton ignores that relatively trivial wordplay, and focuses instead on the more important links between Dis and the discord that followed his attempt. But he nonetheless makes play with the word "fruit" and quickly makes the link with death explicit in those opening lines we may now hear again:

[31] George Sandys, *Ovid's Metamorphosis. Englished by G.S., Mythologiz'd and Represented in Figures: An Essay to the Translation of Virgil's Aeneis* (Oxford: 1632), p. 256, quoted by Fowler ad loc 4.268–74, and by Lord, "Pretexts," p. 135. The serpent in the name Pros**erp**ina, with its proposed etymology of "creeping forward," was also noted by Sandys.

Of Mans First **Dis**obedience and the **Fruit**
Of that Forbidden Tree, whose **mortal tast**
Brought **Death** into the World, and all our woe.
(PL 1.1–3; emphasis mine)

6. *Dante*

Dante makes a similar, though much briefer, allusion to the Proserpina story. When he reaches the Earthly Paradise in the *Purgatorio*, he sees the young and lovely Matelda, herself an incarnation of the garden and its innocence, picking flowers in a beautiful springtime landscape. She reminds him, he says, of where and what was Proserpina in the time when her mother lost her, and she lost the spring:

Tu mi fai rimembrar dove e qual era
Proserpina nel tempo che perdette
la madre lei, ed ella primavera.
(*Purgatorio* 28.49–51)[32]

You make me remember where and what was Proserpina at the time her mother lost her, and she the spring.

Proserpina was not normally associated with the loss of spring as such, and Dante has evidently noticed that Ovid, in his version of the story, says briefly that in the fair field of Henna, "perpetuum ver est."[33] Milton picks up and extends the comparison, but the ingredients are already here in Dante.

More important than his version of the Proserpina story, though, is the name "Dis" itself. In the *Inferno*, Dis (or rather *Dite*) is used first as the name for the lowest reach of Hell, which Vergil and Dante approach and enter in Cantos 8 and 9:

Lo buon maestro **disse**: "Omai, figliuolo,
s'appressa la **città** c' ha nome **Dite**,
coi gravi **cittadin**, col grande stuolo."

The good master said: "Now, my son, comes the city called Dis, with its grave citizens and great garrison." (*Inferno* 8.67–69; emphasis mine)

The walls of Dis, the Hell of willful sin, are defended by the rebel angels and contain immediately within the arch-heretics and their followers, those who defied their maker and renounced his truth, so it is appropriate that Dante's "cittadin" picks up and brings together the two words "città" and "Dite." The

[32] See C. H. Grandgent and Charles S. Singleton, eds., *Dante Alighieri. La Divina Commedia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 565; C. H. Martindale, *Transformation*, p. 173; see also Irene Samuel, *Dante and Milton* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966).

[33] *Metamorphoses* 5.391.

inhabitants are, in their pride, personifications of its fierce and defensive independence.

This is, a fortiori, true of the eponymous ruler of the city, the vast and frozen figure of Satan himself, whom Dante also calls "Dite." We hear about him early on, in the plan of Hell that occupies Canto 11, as seated in the smallest circle of Hell, at the central point of the universe (11.64–65). And Dante finally sees him, or more correctly *realizes* that he is seeing him, in the last great Canto of the *Inferno*: "There is Dis," says Vergil, "and there the place where you must put on the armour of fortitude",

> "Ecco *Dite*," dicendo "ed ecco il loco
> ove convien che di fortezza t'armi."
>
> (*Inferno* 34.20–21)

There he is, a traitor in each set of jaws, his three faces echoing Vergil's "deos, Erebumque Chaosque / tergeminamque Hecaten, tria virginis ora Dianae" (*Aen.* 4.510–11: "gods, Erebus and Chaos and threefold Hecate, the three faces of the maiden Diana"), but in this context an infernal parody of the Trinity. He is still, upside down in the ice of Cocytus, except for the ominous and rhythmic flapping of his wings. Down this repulsive body, Vergil and Dante must climb, to the center of the universe, into his very arse, in order to emerge back into the bright world of light. This immobile figure is the opposite of Milton's active and busy Satan, but for that very reason he functions as a kind of shadow, a still point from which to measure the energy of his rival.

Among the reasons for Dante's choice of "Dite" as the most numinous name for his Satan (whom he also calls "Lucifer" and "Beelzebub," but at less significant moments), we should probably cite two. Allegorical implications can extend themselves out more readily from a center that already unites the chief Roman name for the king of the underworld and the Christian figure of the Devil; indeed, the whole picture of the *Inferno* borrows more from Roman tradition than Christian, at least in its physical or tactile aspects. The second reason is more interesting, but it requires that we hear the *Divina Commedia* in its own language, not in English translation. For there is a potential play on the words "Dite" and "Dio," Dis and God—a much more far-reaching pun than is suggested by the equivalent Latin, where Dis *is* one of the gods, not the opponent of the one God himself.

One example must serve. In Canto 11, where we first learn the name of the eponymous king of the "doloroso regno," that name is flanked by six occurences of the word "Dio," three before and three after. There are practical reasons why God's name should be mentioned so often in this Canto, but they are as nothing beside the fact that this is the place at which Dante tells us Satan's seat is at the exact center of the universe. He reinforces this symbolic centrality by arranging the six occurences of the word "Dio" around the central "Dite," making a symbolic seven in all.

7. *Difference*

God and the Devil are frequently aligned with each other in *Paradise Lost*. Even the similarity of sound, to which Dante was so alert, is important in Milton's poem. As he introduces the catalog of fallen angels, he explains that in later life many credulous people will believe they are gods, "Devils to adore for Deities" (1.373). Indeed, the more one pursues the parallels the more one wonders what the difference can be. Milton and his tradition usually maintain the distinction in both narrative and theological ways, so that the likenesses between them are to be accounted for by Satan's mimicry—his effort to equal God.[34]

This principle extends to the act of creation itself, but since Milton imagined creation as differentiation, circumscribing with golden compasses, and dividing day from night—or "The Waters underneath from those above / Dividing" (7.268–69)—one may ask who is imitating whom. No doubt this concept of creation is connected to the effort of Ramist logic, and Puritan politics, to recuperate for God's party the power of just division and discernment. An important image, we have seen, is the two-edged sword that pierces "even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (emphasis mine), which figures the Word of God in Hebrews 12.4.[35] Milton plays with this paradox in his witty analogy for divorce, "which like a divine touch in one moment heals all, and like the word of God, in one instant hushes outrageous tempests into a sudden stilnesse and peacefull calm."[36] He even makes divorce and creation equivalent: "by all consequence to dis-joyn them, as God and nature signifies and lectures to us . . . by the first and last of all his visible works: when by his divorcing command the world first rose out of Chaos, nor can be renewed again out of confusion but by the separating of unmeet consorts."[37] In the parallel passage in *Paradise*

[34] See Steadman, *Milton's Epic Characters* pp. 160–73. He shows, for example, that Milton used the Latin of the Tremellius-Junius Bible (*me aequabo excelso*) rather than the more widespread *ero similis altissimo* to translate "I will be like the Most High" in Isaiah 14.14.

[35] See above; also Budick, *Dividing Muse*, pp. 57–67, and Shoaf, *Duality*, pp. 24–25.

[36] *The Doctrine and Discipline*, 2.17 (YP 2.333); see Lana Cable, "Coupling Logic and Milton's Doctrine of Divorce," *Milton Studies* 15 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1981), pp. 143–59.

[37] *Divorce* 1.10, (YP 2.273). Under "disjoin" 3, the *OED* also cites "That marriage therefore God himself disjoins" (*Divorce* 8.42). Contrast the subtle speech with which Eve offers the fruit to Adam (9.883–85). It ends with some clever nonsense about "deity" and "fate," including an understated threat of divorce that is, in the context, unbearably ironic:

> Least thou not tasting, different degree
> Disjoyne us, and I then too late renounce
> Deitie for thee, when Fate will not permit.

Eve it was who had wanted the separation earlier, and it is scarcely "different degree" or "fate" that disjoins them now, at least not in the way she means.

Lost, Christ's first speech as creative Word substitutes for "outrageous tempests" the "discord" of the troubled waves and the deep:

> Silence, ye troubl'd waves, and thou Deep, peace,
> Said then th' Omnific Word, your discord end.
>
> (PL 7.216–17)

We have to reckon, then, with a more or less explicit contrast in Milton's thought between creative division and discord, but a contrast in which the key terms may overlap or threaten each other. Milton even enjoys the game this allows him to play.

The Satanic infection, then, is not equivalent to the presence of "dis—" words in the language, just as "twoness" is not inherently fallen or sinful. But twoness is dangerous. It is indeed the very source of the problem for Adam—his desire not to be one alone. The poem is a meditation on the problem of duality, how two can come to be from one (in its metaphysical form, a recurrent theme in Donne), and what the consequences are—moral, metaphorical, and linguistic.

The danger extends also to "discourse." The first use of the word in the poem, as for many of the themes, is in Hell—specifically by those devils who prefer philosophy to heroic (and "partial") song. The complicated syntax of these lines, as much as their dialectical or polarized content, suggests what the problem is:

> In discourse more sweet
> (For Eloquence the Soul, Song charms the Sense,)
> Others apart sat on a Hill retir'd,
> In thoughts more elevate, and reason'd high
> Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will and Fate,
> Fixt Fate, free will, foreknowledg absolute,
> And found no end, in wandring mazes lost.
> Of good and evil much they argu'd then,
> Of happiness and final misery,
> Passion and Apathie, and glory and shame,
> Vain wisdom all, and false Philosophie.
>
> (PL 2.555–65)

The inconsequential discourse of the devils bounces back and forth between opposites, evoking the Derridean difference, the contrary term suppressed in each (like "passion" in "apathy," etymologically linked words), and finds no end to this dialectic. There is no way out of the chiasmus-shaped maze in the center.[38]

[38] See chap. 10, below.

As Balachandra Rajan points out,[39] the devils here have lost touch with the intuitive aspect of discourse, to which Raphael refers in describing reason as

> Discursive, or Intuitive; discourse
> Is oftest yours, the latter most is ours,
> Differing but in degree, of kind the same.
>
> (PL 5.488–90)

Innocent discourse ought, then, to be possible, but Raphael's idealized vision of the future, to which these lines belong, with mankind gradually moving up the scale of being, never comes to pass, and it is already threatened by what we have seen of the devils' discourse in Hell. Eve, conversing with Adam, can forget all time—indeed, she tells him this in loving dialogue (4.639). But Adam feels the risk, as he tries to explain to Raphael:

> All higher knowledge in her presence falls
> Degraded, Wisdom in discourse with her
> Looses discount'nanc't, and like folly shewes.
>
> (PL 8.551–53)

Raphael is unimpressed by Adam's argument, and tells him to show more self-respect, but Adam's play with "dis—" is deeply serious, and goes to the root of the "twoness" from which the prefix derives. Even in his unfallen state, the "running to and fro" of language between the partners of a "dialogue," which is the etymology of "discourse," quickly becomes a loss of something, here the loss of wisdom's face in "discount'nanc't."[40] It reminds us of that endless bouncing back and forth that is the devils' discourse in Hell. And Adam's worry brings us back to that subsequent use of the word "discourse" in the poem (9.5), near the point of departure for this chapter, and helps to explain why the word there should be so anxiously hedged about: "Venial discourse unblam'd."

The words of Adam's confession to Raphael anticipate the discourse that man and woman are to have in Book 9.205–385, the dispute that will lead to the separation and Fall, when all the angel's warnings go for nought. Discourse might be innocent for angels, as in God's instructions to Raphael:

> Converse with *Adam* . . .
> . . . . . .
> . . . and such discourse bring on,
> As may advise him of his happie state,
> Happiness in his power left free to will.
>
> (PL 5.230–35)

[39] Balachandra Rajan, *John Milton: Paradise Lost Books I and II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 83. See also the discussion in Fowler's note ad loc.

[40] See the discussion of "defaced," nn. 8 & 9, above.

But among human beings, such innocent discourse is scarcely possible. Indeed, such discourse, in Eve's mind at least, becomes a reason for the separation. "Let us divide our labours," she says,

> For while so near each other thus all day
> Our taske we choose, what wonder if so near
> Looks intervene and smiles, or object new
> Casual discourse draw on, which intermits
> Our dayes work brought to little
>
> (PL 9.214–24)

This is exactly what will happen anyway, as Ricks points out, and the serpent, as object new, does indeed distract Eve from her "labours." In one sense his discourse is not casual at all, but in another, deeper sense it is precisely, in the root sense of the word "casual," a discourse of the Fall.[41] With such ironies at work in the poem's language, it is not surprising that neither Adam nor Eve is able to avoid the separation to which their discourse leads, for the word is already infected by death. Indeed, just as the serpent is there in Pro**serp**ine, as the mythographers remarked, so the Roman god of the dead is already there in Para**dis**e.

[41] Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style*, p. 146. He cites as a parallel the "casual fire" (lightning) of 11.566.

EIGHT

HOMER IN MILTON: THE ATTENDANCE MOTIF AND THE GRACES

> Is the devil to have all the passions as well as all the good tunes?
> —SHAW, *Man and Superman*

In this chapter we turn the coin, from "disgrace" back to "grace." Milton draws various parallels between Eve and Homer's graceful heroines. Helen, for example, refers to herself as the cause of the Trojan War and wishes she had preferred death to Paris (e.g., *Iliad* 3.173). In her regret at what has happened, Eve, too, wishes for death, indeed proposes a suicide pact (PL 10.1001). She also refers to herself as a "snare" for Adam, and goes on to wonder at the irony in her name: "That I who first brought Death on all, am **grac't** / The sourse of life" (11.165–69; emphasis mine). But it is not only after the Fall and in irony that these echoes resonate. Among the most interesting is that, like the beautiful women of classical epic, Eve is attended by the Graces. Despite the Renaissance and Christian trappings that these oddly intrusive handmaidens of Venus have acquired, Milton remains faithful to the Homeric context. But his rhetorical purpose, as in the Satanic adaptation of Sarpedon's speech about monarchy,[1] is very different. The clarity of oral poetic narrative is replaced by a written text designed to instruct, to delight, and to betray.[2] In this respect the new narrative style performs for the reader a similar function to that of Satan (consciously) and Eve (unconsciously) within it. The analogy is always at work between the Satanic discourse, whether in Hell or in the Garden, and a narration that implicates the reader in its action and decisions. Even when he is absent as a character, as in Book 8, the main focus of this chapter, the poem is still the Satanic epic. Book 8 is both the last fantasy of innocence before the coming catastrophe, and a preparation for that fatal event.

Milton probably noticed that Homer never describes Helen in any detail in the *Iliad*. Rather he suggests her incomparable beauty through the reaction of

[1] See Introduction, 4, above.

[2] Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963) was an important discussion of this distinction; for example, pp. 208–10. For a summary of more recent developments in oral theory, see John Foley, "What's in a Sign?" in E. Anne Mackay, ed., *Signs of Orality* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

the Trojan elders to her appearance on the Skaean Gate. Summoned by Iris, Helen leaves her chamber and goes out onto the walls, "not alone, for her two handmaidens followed with her" (*Iliad* 3.143).[3] When the assembled elders see her, they are made to say, in effect: it is no wonder that the Trojan War should be fought over a woman like that, "for she is terribly like immortal goddesses in her face" (3.156–58). Both the response of the male elders and the fact that Helen appears accompanied by two servants are elements of a complex Homeric convention, and Milton seems to have been aware of some of its subtler implications.

The main ingredients of the convention have been identified in a book by Michael Nagler on Homer's techniques of oral composition.[4] The attendance motif is a regular part of the oral-formulaic tradition, and has a wide range of significance. It is used both for men and women. Throughout most of the *Iliad*, for example, Achilles stays apart from his compatriots, but at the climactic moment of reconciliation with Priam, he is once again attended, and the moment is marked by what Nagler (187) calls the "most dictionally specific stage" of the attendance motif:

> And the son of Peleus went forth from the house like a lion,
> Not alone, for two attendants followed with him,
> Automedon the hero, and Alkimos.
>
> (*Iliad* 24.572–74)

This explicit phrasing, especially the formulaic line beginning *ouk oios* ("not alone"), indicates that Achilles has now formally and finally resumed his place among his comrades.

Similarly, Odysseus is provided with two attendants when he prepares to regain his kingdom. One is the swineherd, Eumaios, who has already played a large role in the narrative. The other is Philoitios, an obscure cowherd who appears first at 20.185 and seems to have been invented ad hoc to satisfy the demands of this traditional motif. During the bow test all three go outside together, but since Odysseus has not yet recovered his rightful status, he is explicitly described as following them (*Odyssey* 21.188–90). Now Odysseus reveals himself to them as their rightful lord and master, and when they reenter the palace Odysseus precedes them (lines 242–44). The effect of the motif is thus to mark the status and dignity of the hero in relation to his fellows. Telemachus is accompanied to the assembly by two dogs at *Odyssey* 2.11, a line that uses the same formulaic language ("not alone [*ouk oios*], for a

[3] Homer, *Iliad*, ed. David B. Monro and Thomas W. Allen, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1920). For the *Odyssey*, I cite *The Odyssey of Homer*, ed. W. B. Stanford (New York: Macmillan, 1965). All translations are my own.

[4] Michael Nagler, *Spontaneity and Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 64–111.

pair of swift dogs followed with him"), because he is noble, yes, but has not yet attained his father's status as ruler.

When the attendance motif is applied to women, it carries a more complicated set of meanings. It still signifies the status and dignity of the attended person, but to this is added the sexual question of the woman's chastity. When Helen appears on the Trojan walls accompanied by her women, the sexual implications are muted, but when, a little later in the same book, she goes back down, driven by Aphrodite to meet Paris, the handmaidens turn to their household tasks, and Helen proceeds alone (*Iliad* 3.422–23). Paris invites her to bed, in words similar to those Zeus speaks to Hera at a similar moment (3.441–46; 14.314–28): "Never before has such desire [*erōs*] overwhelmed me." The male response to the alluring female is now explicitly sexual.

Nausikaa lies asleep with two handmaidens beside her in *Odyssey* 6.18 when Athena comes to visit, and again at line 84 she appears "not alone, for her handmaidens went along as well." But soon those attendants flee before the stranger Odysseus, and she remains alone to face him. Their encounter is full of sexual implications, like Odysseus's other meetings with strange women on faraway islands, although this time both characters preserve the decencies (with only a branch in Odysseus's case).

The fullest realization of this allurement convention is reserved for Penelope. Her own chastity is firmly stressed throughout the *Odyssey*, but nonetheless, or perhaps in consequence, she arouses the suitors to a frenzy of desire (cf. 1.330–34, 365–66; 21.58–65, 72–73):

> So saying she came down from her glowing chamber
> Not alone, for two handmaidens followed with her.
> When she came before the suitors, lovely among women,
> She stopped by the pillar of the solid roof,
> Wearing a bright veil across her cheeks;
> A devoted handmaiden stood on either side.
> And the suitors grew weak at the knees, they burned with desire [*erōs*].
> And all clamored to lie beside her in bed.
>
> (*Odyssey* 18.206–13)

Odysseus himself is present for this appearance, though Penelope does not know it. Indeed, what moves her to come down to the suitors remains unclear to her, though she manages the scene with her usual skill. In fact, as the audience knows, it is Athena's doing. A few lines before, she had put Penelope to sleep and then made her like Aphrodite and the dancing Graces:

> She bathed her beautiful face with a cream,
> Ambrosia, such as the garlanded Aphrodite
> Anoints herself with, when she joins the ravishing dance of the Graces.
>
> (*Od.* 18.192–94)

The same reference to the Graces also accompanies the sleep of Nausikaa when she conceives the equally mysterious idea (Athena again) of going down to the river to wash her wedding clothes:

> [Athena] went into the ornate bedchamber, in which a girl
> Was sleeping, like the immortal goddesses in figure and form,
> Nausikaa, daughter of great-hearted Alkinoos,
> And near her two handmaidens, with beauty from the Graces.
> (*Od.* 6.15–18)

Unlike Penelope, Nausikaa is still a virginal young girl, so the explicit reference to Aphrodite is generalized to "immortal goddesses," but the Graces remain in the beauty of her attendants. When the young princess appears at the center of her dancing attendants, she is compared not to Aphrodite but to Artemis and her nymphs, in the famous simile that Vergil adapted for the still innocent Dido (*Odyssey* 6.100–9; *Aeneid* 1.498–504). Nevertheless, Athena has told Nausikaa that the time for her wedding is near, and this thought continues to shape both her meeting with her father and the encounter with the stranger on the shore.

In these cases where the attendance motif is used for a woman, it actually becomes a full type-scene with its own narrative shape. The scene begins with the visitation of a goddess; it continues with the anointing of the woman and her appearance, accompanied by her handmaidens, before a male audience. The scene ends in every case with an appreciative or explicitly sexual reaction by the men, whether the compliments and marriage hints of Odysseus to Nausikaa, the subdued but expressive response of the elders to Helen, or the clamor of Penelope's suitors. The Pandora episode in Hesiod's *Works and Days* is also a variant of this scene, which must have been a part of the general Greek tradition, part of what the oral singers learned as apprentices to their trade.[5] Those variants of the scene that end in bed—the Helen, Hera, and Pandora examples (as well as Aphrodite herself in the Homeric Hymn)—lack the signifiers of chastity, a veil, and the attendants.

It may well have been Milton's awareness of the range of implications in the type-scene that led him to reserve the explicitly seductive version until immediately after the Fall. Then Adam repeats to Eve what Paris said to Helen, and Zeus to Hera, in the *Iliad*:

[5] I have discussed these Homeric conventions more fully in "The Allurement Scene," *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 13 (1979): 107–20. I do not suggest here that Milton had recognized the type-scene; he was happily ignorant of the terminological complexities to which modern theorists of oral poetry have been driven. But he was certainly aware of the attendance convention, and may well have noticed the narrative similarities among some of the variants of the allurement scene. He was clearly alert to the underlying sexual significance of the Pandora episode, for example, though it is not stressed by Hesiod.

> But come, so well refresh't, now let us play,
> As meet is, after such delicious Fare;
> For never did thy Beautie since the day
> I saw thee first and wedded thee, adorn'd
> With all perfections, so enflame my sense
> With ardor to enjoy thee, fairer now
> Then ever, bountie of this vertuous Tree.
>
> (PL 9.1027–33)

Like Hera, Aphrodite, and Pandora, Eve is here adorned with all perfections, and, like the more brazen of Homer's alluring females, unattended. Technically, Eve could not have anyone other than Adam for a companion, but the pressure of the Homeric convention is so strong that the prelapsarian Eve, yet sinless, is often pictured properly attended in the Homeric manner.

Milton actually makes use of both the male and female versions of the attendance motif in *Paradise Lost*, and even emphasizes more explicitly than the Homeric sources the distinction between the two. One of his major themes, after all, is the difference between the sexes—cause of the greatest delights in Paradise, and also of the tragedy.

For Adam, Milton alludes to the Homeric motif only in order to cancel all its implications. The allusion is one of the many ways in which he asserts his independence from the epic tradition, even while he uses its techniques. A Homeric hero was not complete without his attendants; they mark his dignity, status, and dependence on his subordinates. It is entirely appropriate, for example, that when Telemachus arrives on Pylos he should find Nestor surrounded by his sons and attendants (*Odyssey* 3.32): the moment even has a special poignance and significance for Telemachus, who is striving for the status and friends indicated by the motif. But when Raphael comes to visit Adam, in a scene that otherwise imitates closely the type-scene of a Homeric guest's arrival and the hospitality he normally receives, Milton expressly renounces the tradition of regal pomp (by now, of course, the mark of a social system he had come to despise in King Charles). Instead Milton describes his host thus:

> Mean while our Primitive great Sire, to meet
> His god-like Guest, walks forth, without more train
> Accompani'd then with his own compleat
> Perfections, in himself was all his state,
> More solemn then the tedious pomp that waits
> On Princes, when thir rich Retinue long
> Of Horses led, and Grooms besmeard with Gold
> Dazles the croud, and sets them all agape.
>
> (PL 5.350–57)

Note the force of "besmeard," and the "croud" whom the "pomp" is designed to "dazle" (and so confuse or betray). In Paradise, of course, Adam has no society to impress. Indeed, he and Eve are typically isolated in what has been called the "Robinson Crusoe situation" characteristic of the Puritan-individualist tradition, alone to face their ordeal like Bunyan's Christian, the Lady in *Comus*, Jesus in the wilderness, or Samson abandoned to his blindness and self-doubt.[6] There may be no clearer instance in *Paradise Lost* of Milton's emphasis on the inner man, "the upright heart and pure," than this conscious and explicit rejection of the epic entourage for his new man, Adam: "in himself was all his state." The dramatic situation calls for these new creatures to be alone, but it does not demand such proud insistence on the point.

For Eve, however, it is a very different matter. She is by no means as self-sufficient as the Adam who strides forth to meet their guest. (Nor is Adam, in fact, as he will soon confess to Raphael, for his weakness lies in his love for Eve, and what he is prepared to do to retain hers.) Far from canceling the Homeric motif as he does for Adam, Milton intensifies it for Eve, and the difference suggests one of the chief attributes by which Eve is characterized. Adam's independence of the Homeric servants reveals his confidence in his "compleat / Perfections," but Eve often appears surrounded, even if merely "Veild in a Cloud of Fragrance" (9.425), as she is seen by Satan, or with "an awe / About her, as a guard Angelic plac't" (8.558–59), as she is seen by Adam. In fact, she is used to being surrounded, we are told, and so she pays no attention to Satan's approach as serpent,

> as us'd
> To such disport before her through the Field,
> From every Beast, more duteous at her call,
> Than at *Circean* call the Herd disguis'd.
>
> (PL 9.519–22)

Milton's comparison of Eve to Circe, the most terrifyingly alluring of all Homer's females, at the very moment when she is about to be tempted and virtually seduced by Satan, implies that Satan may have something more than mere innocence with which to work. But what is important for our present context is that each of the kinds of attendance with which Milton supplies Eve, including the Circean herd, is illusory: all of them represent what someone sees, mistakenly, around her. She actually wears no veil and has no "guard Angelic"; nor is Satan, as she supposes, an obedient member of her animal entourage.

[6] Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1958), pp. 381–82; idem, *Milton and the English Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1977), p. 49. See also Isabel Gamble MacCaffrey, *Paradise Lost* as "Myth" (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), pp. 188–94, and Ian Watt, *Myths of Modern Indiviualism: Faust, Don Quixote, Don Juan, Robinson Crusoe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Milton's most direct imitation of this Homeric model occurs at the moment when Eve leaves Adam and Raphael to their discussion of astronomy. Here Eve is made expressly sensual, partly because Milton has understood and co-opted for his own purposes the ambivalent sensuality of the Homeric type-scene, with its range of implications from chastity to explicit sex. The separation of Adam and Eve at this point is dramatically motivated, since Milton must get Eve off-stage so that Adam can tell Raphael how he feels about her. But it also anticipates the second and fatal separation that is to happen the next day. The two scenes form a pair, and this explains in part the curious emphasis with which Milton marks Eve's departure to tend her flowers. I quote the entire passage because it contains several revealing details:

> So spake our Sire, and by his count'nance seem'd
> Entring on studious thoughts abstruse, which *Eve*
> Perceaving where she sat retir'd in sight,
> With lowliness Majestic from her seat,
> And Grace that won who saw to wish her stay,
> Rose, and went forth among her Fruits and Flours,
> To visit how they prosper'd, bud and bloom,
> Her Nurserie; they at her coming sprung
> And toucht by her fair tendance gladlier grew.
>
> (PL 8.39–47)

The narration now adds what reads like a Miltonic afterthought—as if we might think Eve's departure at this moment a sign of her lack of brains. On the contrary, says the narrator, it is a sign of what a good wife she was, a true companion.

> Yet went she not, as not with such discourse
> Delighted, or not capable her eare
> Of what was high: such pleasure she reserv'd,
> *Adam* relating, she sole Auditress;
> Her Husband the Relater she preferr'd
> Before the Angel, and of him to ask
> Chose rather: hee, she knew would intermix
> Grateful digressions, and solve high dispute
> With conjugal Caresses, from his Lip
> Not Words alone pleas'd her. O when meet now
> Such pairs, in Love and mutual Honour joyn'd?
>
> (PL 8.48–58)

Lest the comment about Adam's lips seem gratuitously sensual in this context, note that Raphael soon confirms their power: "Nor are thy lips ungraceful, Sire of men, / Nor tongue ineloquent" (8.218–19). The comment, stressing Eve's preference, also utterly belies the implications of those notorious words

of Paul: "If they will learn anything, let them ask their husband at home: it is a shame for women to speak in the church" (1 Cor. 14.35). The narration then picks up where that long corrective comment left it.

> With Goddess-like demeanour forth she went;
> Not unattended, for on her as Queen
> A pomp of winning Graces waited still,
> And from about her shot Darts of desire
> Into all Eyes to wish her still in sight.
> And *Raphael* now to *Adam*'s doubt propos'd
> Benevolent and facil thus repli'd.
>
> (PL 8.59–65)

These lines are a direct allusion to Homer's analogy between Aphrodite and Penelope, as well as to the Homeric attendance motif in general. Milton reverses the direction of the woman's motion—she now moves away from the watching males—and so increases the sense of loss, of nostalgic yearning, which the passage as a whole conveys. But otherwise Milton follows Homer closely: "not unattended" translates the Homeric formula, "not alone, for her handmaidens followed with her"; Eve's "Goddess-like demeanour" translates *athanatē isi phuēn kai eidos homoiē* (used, for example, of Nausikaa in *Odyssey* 6.15); the standard Homeric context, a verb of going and a place of movement, is there in Milton, too;[7] and most important, so is the regular Homeric consequence: desire. Even the modulation of the general term "Grace" in line 43 into the specific "Graces" of line 61 has a Homeric origin: Athena sheds the generic *charis*, for example, on Odysseus at 6.235 and 23.162 as he emerges from his bath, while she makes Penelope explicitly like Aphrodite and her dancing Graces (18.193–94), the *charites*.

The closeness of Milton's language to Homer's reveals, as no mere catalog of "sources" could, the extent of his familiarity with the Greek text. But it also makes his departure from Homeric precedent the more remarkable. If this were a typical Homeric simile *à queue longue*, then the Queen and her Graces would normally be enclosed within the ringform of Homer's "*hos . . . hos . . .* " ("as . . , so . . . ") construction, juxtaposed but not merged with the narrative context: Eve and the Graces would remain in their separate worlds.[8] But Milton has modified the Homeric syntax so that "as" governs only the word

[7] See Nagler, *Spontaneity*, p. 68, for what he calls *procedo* and *locus* as ingredients of the pattern. Nagler cites these lines of Milton's as an epigraph for his chapter "The Motif," p. 64. The connection has also been noted by C. A. Martindale in "A Homeric Formula in Milton," *N&Q*, n.s. 24 (1977): 545–47.

[8] See Richmond Lattimore's excellent brief discussion in the introduction to his translation, *The Iliad of Homer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), pp. 40–45, and Phillip Damon, *Modes of Analogy*, p. 279. Even when the grammatical form is modified, as in the ambrosia simile in *Odyssey* 18.193, there is rarely any doubt where simile ends and narrative picks up.

"Queen." The Graces have slipped outside the simile and attached themselves to Eve. The reader, of course, may go back and decide that the Graces are not "really" there, but merely represent a striking change of Homeric simile into Miltonic metaphor. Nonetheless, the pagan and sensual Graces have been momentarily admitted to the Christian Paradise.

Such superimposition of simile on narrative to produce metaphor is a characteristic of written epic, and it disturbs one of the special qualities of Homer's poetry, its vivid and overt objectivity, the clarity with which things are seen and placed.[9] Even though the Graces have spilled out of the simile and into the Garden, Milton's reader is not invited actually to visualize them, but only to sense their impact on an observer. As with the "tedious pomp" that would, in Adam's case, "dazle" the crowd, this pomp of Graces is there as a metaphor of Eve's effect on her audience: the Graces are "winning," and they shoot "Darts of desire / Into all Eyes" (8.62–63).

Both of these descriptions, the second of which is an elaboration of the first, are deliberately ambivalent. "Winning Graces" should remind the reader of the disturbing parallels already established between Eve and Sin. Like Sin, whom we meet first, Eve was born from her male lover, and from his left side at that ("on the left side op'ning wide"; 2.755; "who stooping op'nd my left side"; 8.465); Sin announces herself as an alluring female, reminding Satan in their ironic interview that she

> with attractive graces won
> The most averse, thee chiefly, who full oft
> Thy self in me thy perfect image viewing
> Becam'st enamour'd.
>
> (PL 2.762–65)

And "attractive grace" belongs also to Eve in that notorious distinction of the sexes:

> For contemplation hee and valor formd,
> For softness shee and sweet attractive Grace,
> Hee for God only, shee for God in him.
>
> (PL 4.297–99)

As with Penelope in the Homeric subtext, Eve's association with the Graces arouses desire, and, again as with Penelope, there is a deliberate ambivalence about the attended woman. In *Paradise Lost* this ambivalence is established both

[9] On this quality see the seminal discussion of Erich Auerbach, "Odysseus' Scar," in his *Mimesis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), pp. 3–23, still brilliant despite the unfortunate implications of primitivism that clung, in that period, to Homer. See also Damon, *Modes*, p. 279, and, for comparison of Homer and Vergil in this regard, W. R. Johnson, *Darkness Visible*, p. 12 and passim.

by the echoes of Sin and by the allusion to the fatally charming women of Homer.

Although Homer's *charis* may be translated by the English "Grace," this word has a much wider range of meanings in Milton. The *charis* shed on a hero by a Homeric goddess had become by now the elaborate Christian theological concept of Grace. Adam finally discovers in Book 12 the justification of God's ways in that "over wrauth grace shall abound" (line 478), while Grace is the means, denied to Satan, by which Adam and Eve may repent. God explains early on that

> Man therefore shall find grace,
> The other none.
>
> (PL 3.131–32)

I have argued above that this statement is a major doctrine of the poem, in that it articulates the basic distinction between the trajectory of Satan and that of mankind—but also, in the word "therefore," the connection between them. Because of this doctrine, Satan can only speculate:

> But say I could repent and could obtaine
> By Act of Grace my former state.
>
> (PL 4.93–94)

And the concept animates the final part of the poem, for

> from the Mercie-seat above
> Prevenient Grace descending had remov'd
> The stonie from thir hearts.
>
> (PL 11.2–4)[10]

The connection is by no means casual between the theological meaning of Grace and the quality of grace that attaches to a person, for in a strict theological sense all such grace derives ultimately from the source of Grace itself. God is responsible both for Adam's "manly grace" (4.490) and for Eve's "sweet attractive Grace" (4.298), or that "graceful Innocence" (9.459) that Satan no-

[10] C. A. Patrides, *Milton and the Christian Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 187–219, has a good discussion of the "Grace" controversy as it affects Milton. For Milton and Arminius, see now Stephen Fallon, "'Elect above the rest': theology as self-representation in Milton," in Dobranski and Rumrich, *Milton and Heresy*, pp. 93–116. For the narrative presentation of Grace, see chap. 10, below. Compare *Ad Patrem* 111–14, which includes both Greek *charis* and Latin *gratus* forms:

> At tibi, chare pater, postquam non æqua merenti
> Posse referre datur, nec dona rependere factis,
> Sit memorâsse satis, repetitaque munera grato
> Percensere animo, fidæque reponere menti.

tices: as the source of all substance, God would also be responsible, through his Permissive Will, for the "attractive graces" of Sin.

This double meaning of Grace was not only a key to theological mysteries in the Christian tradition; it also provided Renaissance poets and artists with a rich source of ambivalent imagery. For Eve's grace, though derived from God, is explicitly connected with the Greek (and so pagan) Graces. This ambiguity was a favorite subject of Renaissance commentators and iconographers: the Graces' connotations range, as does the word "grace" in Milton, all the way from the love of God to the charms of Sin. The connection between Christian Grace and pagan Graces was explored in thorough, even tedious, fashion by the Florentine Neoplatonist circle around Ficino and Pico. Their ideas may explain, for example, the teasing, ambivalent quality of Botticelli's Primavera. Interpretation of this painting turns on how one reads the central figures of Venus and the Graces: is she, to put it simply, the earthly Venus, or is she a Platonic emanation of her heavenly prototype? And are the three Graces simply her ladies-in-waiting (*pedissequae*), or are they the "coessential Trinity" of which Venus is the Unity?[11]

A similar ambivalence attaches to Milton's Graces, and therefore to Eve herself. The Graces appear first in the poem during the description of Paradise in Book 4:

> The Birds thir quire apply; aires, vernal aires,
> Breathing the smell of field and grove, attune
> The trembling leaves, while Universal *Pan*
> Knit with the *Graces* and the *Hours* in dance
> Led on th' Eternal Spring.
>
> (PL 4.264–68)

Unlike most of the other allusions to classical gardens in this part of the poem, the presence of the Graces is not negated, or even qualified.[12] Like the pomp of winning Graces around Eve, they are simply present in the Garden, and the pun on "aires" suggests the music to which steps their dance.[13] Given the

[11] On the two Venuses and attendant Graces in Neoplatonic theory, see Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology* (New York: Harper, 1962), pp. 142–69; Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (New York: Barnes, 1968), pp. 26–35; and E. H. Gombrich, *Symbolic Images* (London: Phaidon 1972), p. 39. For the literary tradition see A. Bartlett Giamatti, *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 50–54.

[12] On the Hours and Graces, see DeWitt T. Starnes and Ernest William Talbert, *Classical Myth and Legend in Renaissance Dictionaries* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1955), pp. 94 and 258–59; and Gombrich, *Symbolic*, 47. Roland Mushat Frye, *Milton's Imagery and the Visual Arts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 230, cites comparisons of this passage with the *Primavera*, but neglects the "winning Graces" of 8.61.

[13] On the pun, see Christopher Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style*, pp. 104–5. He is following up Empson's comment on Bentley in *Some Versions of Pastoral*, p. 157: "The airs attune the leaves because the air itself is as enlivening as an air; the trees and wild flowers that are smelt on the air

Platonic connections between divine Grace and the Graces, we might read "Universal *Pan*" simply as a symbol of the force of God's creative power, or "universal nature" as Fowler suggests ad loc.[14] Such an amalgamation would be typical of the Christian humanists. But in Milton's complicated and fragile Paradise, both the sensual connotations and the potential discord in this harmony are equally significant. The question is raised whether the effect of Pan leading the Graces in dance is simply to adorn, or to threaten, the delicate peace of the Garden.

Milton's reader is rarely allowed simply to luxuriate in the description of Paradise. Satan lurks in the Garden, never far from the reader's mind. Moreover, the common link of Graces and golden "Hesperian" apples already implies a darker meaning, and the image of the Graces dancing in Eternal Spring is immediately followed by allusions to Proserpine and Daphne (4.268–75), figures of Eve herself.[15] C. S. Lewis noted that the "deeper value" of the Persephone allusion is that in both Enna and Eden "the young and the beautiful while gathering flowers was ravished by a dark power risen up from the underworld."[16] This is certainly right, especially in view of the echo of the Proserpine passages at 9.395–96 and 424–33, when Satan makes his approach. Satan does not, in the literal sense, "ravish" Eve, though Milton invites us to consider the possibility during their encounter, as Satan sees "alone / The Woman, opportune to all attempts" (9.480–81).[17] The allusions to young girls

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match, as if they caused, as if they were caused by, the birds and leaves that are heard on the air; nature, because of a pun, becomes a single organism. A critical theory is powerful indeed when it can blind its holders to so much beauty." This pastoral synaesthesia of Paradise involves also the hymns of Adam and Eve, which Adam bewails later: "O Woods, O Fountains, Hillocks, Dales and Bowrs, / With other echo late I taught your Shades / To answer, and resound farr other Song" (10.860–62).

[14] On Pan as God of Arcady, see Starnes and Talbert, *Classical Myth and Legend*, p. 293. In the Neoplatonic view, the first deity to arise from Chaos was Phanes, or Love, since Nature felt pleasure at her creation. Phanes and Pan were conflated, for example in Comes: "Alii putarent has Parcas ex illa confusa et informi materia cum Pane pastorum Deo natas fuisse, quae Chaos ab antiquis fuit appellata" (see Starnes and Talbert, p. 359). For Pan and Sylvanus, *deus Faunus*, see p. 80; cf. also the "Nativity" ode, line 89, where Pan, oddly enough since he lent his hoofs to images of Satan, is Christ.

[15] Daphne was the name of an Apolline grove on the Orontes in Syria, but in conjunction with Persephone must also refer to Ovid's tale of the girl pursued by Apollo, *Metamorphoses* 1.450–68. Cf. *Paradise Regain'd* 2.175–95, where the pursuers of nymphs like Daphne are actually the fallen angels; that is, the sons of God from Genesis 6.1–4.

[16] Lewis, *Preface*, p. 42.

[17] The possibility of rape may also be implicit in Homer's version of Penelope and the suitors: see Nagler, pp. 47 n. and 84 n. Milton alludes again to rape, with a curious reversal of its implications, when Satan sees and admires Eve: "Her graceful Innocence . . . overawd / His malice, and with rapine sweet bereav'd / His fierceness of the fierce intent it brought"; he then stands "Stupidly good" (9.459–65). "Rapine" has, of course, broader connotations than sexual rape, as does the Latin root, *rapere*, but in this context the overtone is surely deliberate.

or nymphs like Daphne, Proserpine, and Pomona, not to mention Pandora, Circe, Venus herself, and the Graces,[18] link Eve also with mythological females whose charm the male sex found irresistible, just as Adam (and Satan, briefly) find Eve. This pattern of allusions culminates in the overlapping of "winning Graces" and Homer's Penelope, but the mythological parallels already suggest the sexual ambivalence that attaches to Eve, or to male reactions to her, even before she enters the action.

Her first appearance matches this ambivalence. Botticelli, we remember, painted his Graces in a veil-like dress at once concealing and revealing. This recalls the effect of the veils worn (or cast aside) by Homer's women, and is akin to the sensual description of Eve as veiled but naked:

> Shee as a vail down to the slender waist
> Her unadorned golden tresses wore
> Disheveld, but in wanton ringlets wav'd.
>
> (PL 4.304–6)

In a fine discussion of the "sinister implications" of Eve's veils, Bart Giamatti noted that commentators have seen the Pauline source for these lines in I Corinthians 11.15: "But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering," but that they also allude, through Marino's Adone, to the golden-haired Aphrodite of *Iliad* 3.[19] This double-allusion to biblical chastity and to a sensual Venus that marks the first description of Eve is soon extended by the next mention of the veil. The narrator insists that "no vail/ Shee needed, Vertue-proof" (5.380–84), as she stands to greet Raphael, but the remark occurs in an elaborate mythological context: the Silvan Lodge is like Pomona's Arbor, and Eve is lovelier than the Venus of the Paris legend, ("the fairest Goddess feign'd / Of three that in Mount *Ida* naked strove"). This was the event that provoked the Trojan War, and that delicious "naked strove" brings out its implicit sexuality, even suggesting another, more intimately

[18] 4.268–75 and 9.424–34; 5.377–87; 4.713–18; 9.519–22; see also next note.

[19] Giamatti, *Earthly*, pp. 319–20; cf. PL 4.494–97. For the the use of Spenser's Bower of Bliss in these scenes, compare *FQ* 2.12.63–68, where the wicked nymphs use the veil to inflame Sir Guyon. For the question of naked virtue in general, see Spenser's Graces at *FQ* 6.10.24, lines 3–5 (*The Works of Edmund Spenser*, ed. Edwin Greenlaw et al., 6, [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1938], p. 120):

> And also naked are, that without guile
> Or false dissemblaunce all them plaine may see,
> Simple and true, from couert malice free.

This is an iconographical tradition that goes back at least to Servius's comment on *Aeneid* 1.720: "Ideo autem nudae sunt, quod gratiae sine fuco esse debent," on which see Wind, *Pagan*, pp. 28–29, and Panofsky, *Iconology*, pp. 149–69. Within Milton's lines lurks also an allusion to Nausikaa, who has cast away her veil to play ball with her handmaidens when she greets Odysseus. Nausikaa's game must also lie behind the idea of the Graces playing ball, discussed by Wind, *Pagan*, p. 84, n. 13, especially since the handmaidens are compared to the Graces.

physical competition than that which took place. These allusions not only require an insistence on Eve's virtue, a different kind of nakedness, but culminate in the first link of Eve to Mary.

> So to the Silvan Lodge
> They came, that like *Pomona*'s Arbour smil'd
> With flourets deck't and fragrant smells; but *Eve*
> Undeckt, save with her self more lovely fair
> Then Wood-Nymph, or the fairest Goddess feign'd
> Of three that in Mount *Ida* naked strove,
> Stood to entertain her guest from Heav'n; no vaile
> Shee needed, Vertue-proof, no thought infirme
> Alterd her cheek. On whom the Angel Haile
> Bestowd, the holy salutation us'd
> Long after to blest *Marie*, second *Eve*.
>
> (PL 5.377–87)

This extreme ambivalence is picked up and expanded by the link between Eve and the Graces at the moment in Book 8 she goes off to tend her flowers.

That entire passage, we may now see, is, like Botticelli's *Primavera*, a variant of the standard Renaissance convention of Venus in her springtime garden. Fruits and flowers, we are told, "at her coming sprung, / And toucht by her fair tendance gladlier grew" (8.46–47). She is attended, of course, by the Graces, and to the fundamental Homeric context are added the "Darts of desire" (line 62), like those that Cupid shoots from above Venus's head in the *Primavera*. The Homeric convention is seen through Renaissance lenses. And Milton's equivalent of Botticelli's suggestive clothing, or of Homer's subtle ambivalence about sexual implications, is the surprising verbal ambiguity of this passage.

Appropriately enough, given the connections with Aphrodite/Venus and with Sin, the "winning Graces" of Eve shoot those "Darts of desire," and this is how we first read the passage. To be strictly faithful, however, to the image of Venus and the Graces, we should read "shot" (line 62) as intransitive, with "Darts" as the subject.[20] After all it was Cupid, not the Graces, who went around shooting arrows. But Milton's syntax is not so strict. The conventional activity of Cupid has been superimposed on the image of the Graces, further blurring the syntax and the picture, but intensifying the sexual implications. We might, indeed, read "Darts of desire" as "Darts of Eros," that is, "Cupid," and recall that it is *erōs* ("desire, lust") with which Penelope's suitors are smitten. If the Graces are there, yet not there, around Eve, then Eros has an even

[20] See Fowler ad loc, p. 816 n. And compare 5.15, where Eve's beauty is what "Shot forth peculiar Graces."

more tenuous ontological status in the passage. But the effect, again, is what counts—the impact on the audience—and the effect of Eros's darts was usually to make the victim gaze longingly at the beloved: precisely what happens to Adam as Eve departs.[21]

By this point in the poem, the reader should be alert to the shock of finding sensual language used in innocent ways before the Fall.[22] But he may feel a certain discomfort that Eve should provoke desire, even under cover of a mythological allusion. He will probably experience more discomfort if he recalls that the audience into whose eyes the darts of desire shoot includes the archangel Raphael. The reader must immediately cancel all these lascivious ideas, however, for the sentence does not end with the line, nor even with the desire-pierced eyes. Instead the word "desire" turns out to be modified by the infinitive clause, "to wish her still in sight." So this is not, after all, the "Carnal desire" that erupts after the apple is eaten (9.1013), still less the "fierce desire" to which Satan confesses on first seeing Adam and Eve make love (4.509), but merely that Latinate and rather stilted English word that means "to wish for." Once we reconstruct the syntax in this way, the words "desire . . . to wish" are seen to be oddly repetitive and we realize that Milton has offered us, by the network of allusions, the sexual meaning of "desire," only to retract the offer with the colorless synonym "wish." One may assess the effect of the word-order here, especially of the word "desire" falling at the end of the line, by comparing the less ambiguous echo of this passage at the second, fatal separation the next day: there Adam watches Eve's departure, and "Her long with ardent look his Eye pursu'd / Delighted, but desiring more her stay" (9.397–98).[23] This time the sexual meaning of "desire" is carried over from the "ardent look," even if it is quickly subsumed within the more general idea of the specific object, "her stay." Such are the ways in which the text performs its seductive work.[24]

[21] For example, the *Argonautica* of Apollonius, 3.282–88; see the examples collected by Panofsky, *Iconology*, pp. 95–128.

[22] See Fish, *Surprised*, pp. 92–107, especially the critical discussions collected on p. 93.

[23] Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style*, pp. 98–99, makes a similar point without citing the parallel. He aptly cites Richardson, who also noticed the ambiguity of the syntax and "hurried to protect Eve's honour: 'This passage must be pointed thus, as in Milton's Editions; as Some have done it, it makes Wild work. Darts of Desire but only to Wish her Stay.'"

[24] Cf. 5.443–50, discussed above, chap. 3.5, where the description of the naked Eve ministering at table for Adam and angel suddenly evokes from the narrator, first a reference to the sons of God who at Gen 6.1–4 fell for the daughters of men, and in many accounts thus caused the Fall (see n. 31, below), and then a reference to "jealousie / . . . the injur'd Lovers Hell." Flannagan (RM, n. 139, p. 490) points out ad loc that "lurking in the background in Eden, however, is Satan," but, since he is definitely absent as a character at this point, and a very different and unfallen angel is present, I would rather say that the text is potentially Satanic; no one, for example, has mentioned jealousy.

One of the typical differences between written and oral epic is that the former involves the reader in the world of the poem by engaging his responses with the characters'. In the *Odyssey* it is Penelope's suitors, not the audience, who lust after the Queen, but Milton's reader has himself been lured into a response to Eve that he must now correct, or reassess. The reader's error prepares him to be sympathetic when Adam confesses the same error to Raphael. In a long and moving speech about being in love (8.470–560), Adam describes the creation of Eve, with several allusions to Pandora, and his own reaction to the dream experience: "I wak'd / To find her, or for ever to deplore / Her loss" (8.478–80). He mentions his own weakness "Against the charm of Beauties powerful glance" (533) and adds, in a further allusion to Homer's attendance motif, that

> Authority and Reason on her waite,
> As one intended first, not after made
> Occasionally; and to consummate all,
> Greatness of mind and nobleness thir seat
> Build in her loveliest, and create an awe
> About her, as a guard Angelic plac't.
>
> (PL 8.554–59)

Adam's misappropriation of the Homeric motif suggests the reversal of his priorities. Now, not the Graces but Authority and Reason themselves wait upon Eve and contribute to that nearly visible aura that surrounds her. She has no such Angelic guard, of course, for the crucial test, and this will enhance the pathos of the tragedy, but it is Adam's distorted perception of Eve, now shared by the reader, that will allow the tragedy to happen.

Penelope's suitors, too, are so intent on winning her to wife that they constantly ignore the social priorities of the Homeric world, especially the importance of the guest-friend customs splendidly illuminated by M. I. Finley in *The World of Odysseus*. Other factors, to be sure, contribute to their doom, notably their greed and their sheer physical inferiority to Odysseus. But both for the suitors and for Adam, it is ultimately their inability to control their responses to female allurement that brings disaster.

In the *Odyssey*, however, Odysseus himself is also present for the final appearances of Penelope to the suitors within the framework of the allurement type-scene. Unlike the suitors, Odysseus conceals his emotion and continues to plan his revenge and remarriage.[25] At Penelope's appearance in Book 18—the first time he has seen his wife in twenty years—Odysseus is delighted by her cleverness in getting gifts from the rapacious suitors (lines 281–83), but otherwise has no reaction that Homer cares to tell us about. When Odysseus and the circumspect Penelope do finally talk, his own cunning proves equal to

[25] See, for example, *Odyssey* 19.209–12.

his wife's intelligence, and their mutual admiration is reconfirmed. Norman Austin's fine study of their conversations has shown the subtleties of this slow process of rediscovery, and how much they both enjoy their psychological tussle.[26] They become such a pair, in fact, as meet "in Love and mutual Honour joyn'd" (PL 8.58).

We might, then, pose Adam's dilemma in *Paradise Lost* by asking whether his reaction to Eve will be more like the suitors' or like Odysseus's: will he simply go weak in the knees with desire, or will he, despite the yearning, the need to have her by him, prove like Odysseus a match for his wife's wits. In the event, of course, his desire weakens him, and when the crisis comes, as Milton's psychological subtlety shows, it is this overwhelming desire to keep her that distorts his judgment and makes him yield to her arguments with those wise and yet tragic words: "Go; for thy stay, not free, absents thee more" (9.372).

Adam's confession to Raphael anticipates his decision to let Eve go off alone, and then to eat the apple himself, not deceived by Satan but "fondly overcome with Femal charm" (9.999). The confession calls forth a sharp rebuke from Raphael:

> In loving thou dost well, in passion not,
> Wherein true Love consists not; love refines
> The thoughts, and heart enlarges, hath his seat
> In Reason, and is judicious, is the scale
> By which to heav'nly Love thou maist ascend,
> Not sunk in carnal pleasure.
>
> (PL 8.588–93)

Adam will not remember Raphael's warning, with its classic Renaissance distinction, blending Plato and Paul, between sacred and profane love. Raphael's whole speech is a kind of summary of Neoplatonic teaching about love. It was in this same Neoplatonic way that the *Odyssey* had been interpreted ever since the moralization of the poem, initiated by Zeno and the Stoics, and continued in Horace, Plutarch, and Porphyry,[27] as an allegory of a soul learning to distinguish among kinds of love, and finally winning through to its spiritual goal. Adam fails, then, to learn the lessons of the *Odyssey* summarized in Raphael's speech, but the reader may better sympathize with Adam's eventual decisions once he has found his own reaction to Eve to be closer to that of Penelope's suitors than to that of her husband.

Adam's problem becomes the reader's problem, however, not simply by the

[26] Norman Austin, *Archery at the Dark of the Moon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), pp. 223–38.

[27] W. B. Stanford, *The Ulysses Theme* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1968), pp. 118–27, is the most concise summary of this development; see also Don Cameron Allen, *Mysteriously Meant* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), pp. 83–106.

inevitable misreading of the word "desire" and its implications for his own sexuality. For the passage about Eve and the Graces is set in a context that explicitly addresses the reader. Immediately after describing the way Eve likes to listen to her husband expound celestial mechanics in bed, and just before her departure from the scene, Milton inserts a plaintive question: "O when meet now / Such pairs, in Love and mutual Honour joyn'd ?" (8.57–58). The effect of this intrusion is to jolt the reader out of this pleasant world of Paradise and back, momentarily, to his own. By that emphatic word "now" the reader loses the fantasy of presence to the action, that unselfconscious absorption in the illusion of fiction, and is cast with a shock into his own presence. This technique had occasionally been used even by Homer to evoke nostalgia for the heroic age; Ajax and Hector both lift rocks that no two men of today could budge. But in Milton this epic device is much more frequent and helps to create that nostalgia for Paradise that is one of the principal emotions with which we are invited to read Milton's poem. The harsh juxtaposition of the reader's "now" with the primordial time of Paradise thus makes his experience of reading the poem the equivalent of the characters' experience within it: what happens to Adam and Eve is both the occasion for, and the explanation of, the reader's nostalgia. Thus even when the reader reconstructs the syntax of the next few lines and "desire" loses its sexual meaning, it still carries the connotations of nostalgia: "to wish her still in sight" (line 63), after all, means to miss what is gone from presence, precisely what the reader himself has just experienced.

In order to see how difficult it is to distinguish Adam from the reader watching Eve depart, consider the word "still" in line 61: "A pomp of winning Graces waited still." In view of the intrusion of the word "now" in the previous lines, does "still" mean that the Fall has not yet happened, that we are back in primordial dreamtime, and so Eve is still lovely, still attended by the divine Graces? Or does "still" indicate that she has by now disappeared from Adam's sight—as "still" in line 63 implies? That is, do we (Adam, Raphael, reader) see the Graces and feel the darts, which somehow Eve leaves behind her, not still in sight herself ? The two possibilities are equally plausible, and in either case the dominant feeling is nostalgia, desire for what is lost even as we move back into the dreamworld and the narrative resumes.

This sense of loss is what Satan articulates on seeing Adam and Eve together, "Imparadis't in one anothers arms / The happier *Eden* . . . while I to Hell am thrust" (4.506–8). It is of fundamental importance to the poem and is one of the chief ways in which it moves. In spite of his Platonic interests revealed in the overlapping of Homeric and Renaissance Aphrodites, Milton as a radical Protestant could have little sympathy with much of the Neoplatonic allegorizing that had blended Christian Grace and pagan Graces. In particular he could not accept, any more than Augustine before him, the casual attitude toward the Fall that Platonism implied—no fundamental discontinuity in the

cosmos, but merely a series of emanations from the source to the whole world. What the Platonists had tried to blend into a unified totality could have for Milton only a tenuous harmony, and then only in Paradise itself. Milton's Paradise is a unified world, built up with many of the allusions made current by the allegorizers, but it is a world about to be lost. For the reader who suffers the effects of that loss, the sensual and the spiritual halves of the allegory of love have separated, as they do for Adam and Eve immediately after the Fall, into "Carnal desire," *erōs* (Satan's "fierce desire"), and the love of God, *agapē*. The image of Eve and the Graces thus evokes first a fallen, carnal reaction, which must then be adjusted to the innocence of Eden. Only on such ambivalent terms, with as much emphasis on *discordia* as on *concors*,[28] are the Graces admitted to Paradise.

We have so far noticed only Adam's weakness for his wife's charms. But Milton's final use of the Homeric attendance motif in *Paradise Lost* suggests that Eve herself is equally vulnerable to her own ambivalent image as the desirable woman. The Narcissus passage at 4.460–66 had already made this clear, and Satan plays on this weakness in the temptation scene. He pictures Eve at the head of an adoring throng. As he contemplates her in soliloquy before addressing her directly, he imagines her as "fit Love for Gods" (9.489), and this idea, suggesting all the pursued nymphs of classical mythology,[29] forms the basis of his temptation:

> one man except,
> Who sees thee? (and what is one?) who shouldst be seen
> A Goddess among Gods, ador'd and serv'd
> By Angels numberless, thy daily Train.
>
> (PL 9.545–48)

In the dream Satan had already implanted the suggestion that Eve might "be henceforth among the Gods / Thy self a Goddess" (5.77–78). In the picture of herself that Satan now offers her, Eve becomes again a pagan "Goddess among Gods" with a "Train" of Angels to attend her. Satan has ingenuously superimposed the image of Aphrodite and her attendant Graces (and we must not miss the sexual hint in the idea of a female goddess among male gods) on the serpent's temptation in Genesis 3.5, "ye shall be as gods." It is to this image of

[28] See Wind's discussion of "discordia concors," *Pagan*, pp. 81–112.

[29] The words also allude to Genesis 6.1–4, the fragment about the sons of God and the daughters of men, generally thought by early Jewish commentators to be the explanation of the existence of evil: see Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, pp. 147–80, and above, chap. 1, sect. 2. The story of the lustful angels was developed in *The Book of Enoch*. Milton may have known this Jewish apocryphal work through the parts of the Greek version cited in Syncellus, to which Scaliger had called attention in *Thesaurus Temporum, Eusebii Pamphili Chronicorum Canonum Omnimodae Historiae Libri Duo*, 2d ed. (Amsterdam, 1658), pp. 404–5. Milton also tells this tale at 11.573–627; cf. 5.447–50.

herself that Eve finally succumbs. Satan's last words before she talks herself into eating the fruit are "Goddess humane, reach then, and freely taste" (9.732).

Both Falls—Eve's and Adam's—are caused in part by a distortion of their attitudes toward the woman's grace. To love the gift, and not the giver in the gift, was Augustine's major distinction between *cupiditas* and *caritas*. On the man's part, the sin is uxoriousness; on the woman's, vanity. And both errors, to which the reader has discovered himself prone, are implied by Milton's modification of the Homeric attendance motif.

The presence of these allusions in Milton's text makes us read two poets at once. The main passage in which the Homeric text is evoked, Eve and the Graces, first suggests all the sexual implications of the Homeric original, even intensifies them by the superimposition of the Renaissance Cupid, of Venus in her sensual garden, only to cancel them at once, leaving in their absence an innocent vision of prelapsarian sexuality. In the absence of Homer, the fresh Miltonic meaning defines itself. The Homeric convention brings with it Homeric meanings, which Milton intensifies and rejects. Milton invites the reader to follow the track of his own extended movement toward composition—to submit to the discipline of Homeric Greek, acknowledging the power of Homer's humane subtlety; then to place that Homeric humanity in the post-Eden world of ordinary sexuality, complicated and ambiguous; finally to transcend that Homeric knowledge in self-knowledge. Reading Homer in Milton's way is certainly a "strong" reading, yet it must surely, like any genuinely strong reading, be an accurate one: the Homeric meaning must come across intact before it is enlarged, transformed, and denied. Scholarly knowledge of the Homeric topos marks us as fallen, alien from the sweet ignorance of Eden, even as it enables us to respond to, and finally to understand, the poems. Such knowledge suggests our complicity with Satan, who uses this knowledge to ruin Eve and then comfortably leaves human sexual need to take its course with Adam. Yet in our achieved self-knowledge, when Adam and Eve make their respective decisions, we may better sympathize now that we have ourselves been victims, as Satan soon will be, of Eve's ambiguous Grace. The text of this passage in Book 8 has created for the reader a space that is about to be occupied by Satan.

NINE

SATAN TEMPTER

pleasing was his shape,
And lovely, never since of Serpent kind
Lovelier . . .

—PL 9.503–5

1. *Intercourse*

The well-known anthropologist Ruth Finnegan, author of important books such as *Oral Literature in Africa* and *Oral Poetry*, did her initial fieldwork among the Limba people of Sierra Leone. She spent a lot of time collecting their traditions, especially their tales, for her thesis. One day they told her, now its your turn. We've told you lots of our stories, now you tell us one of yours. She protested briefly, but then chose to tell them the story of Adam and Eve. They listened politely but made little comment at the time. Two years later she went back to Sierra Leone to continue collecting tales: one of the stories she now heard was called "Adamu and Ifu." It was about a clever snake who seduced Adamu's wife and took her to live with him in the bush. They started a family of their own and Adamu was very jealous. What the Limba had done was to adapt the story to fit perfectly into their own preoccupations, since many of their tales concern adulterous wives, apparently a source of much anxiety among the Limba.

This original adaptation, I suggest, points to what is, in fact, one of the potential meanings of the biblical myth, not developed at all in the Genesis version, but there nonetheless if we lean hard enough on the narrative. Satan is a sexual interloper, an adulterer. In fact, the midrashic retellings of the Adam and Eve story by the rabbis had soon produced a version in which Eve was literally seduced by the serpent-figure, who thus became the father of Cain. The story is well known in the Jewish tradition, where the angel in this form is usually known as Sammael. It also lies behind at least one New Testament passage, a letter of John's that distinguishes "the children of god" from "the children of the devil. . . . For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, and not be like Cain who was of the evil one and murdered his brother" (1 John 3.11–12).[1] The story was widely known in the Renaissance and spawned many variants: it was adapted, for example, by Phineas Fletcher in his partly allegorical *The Locusts*, or *Apol-*

[1] Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, pp. 236–37, 312–14. See also Bamberger, *Fallen Angels*, p. 281.

lyonists (1627), which makes "Sin" the daughter of Satan by Eve, and depicts her as half-woman, half-serpent, like Milton's Sin. John Leonard points out in his edition that Fletcher made her "Porter to th' infernall gate" (1.10–12),[2] thus showing that she is a definite influence on Milton's own partly allegorical Sin. In the contemporary Samuel Pordage, Satan chooses a particular serpent he has seen in Eve's lap, who

> Had gain'd Eve's love, or who it may be had
> Entwin'd about her naked neck, and play'd
> With her white hands, or favour'd in her lap.[3]

Similarly, Lawrence Clarkson and the Muggletonians interpreted the Fall as Eve's sexual pollution by Satan.[4]

This well-known story takes on varied coloring as it reappears in other contexts. In his *Meditations of Mans Mortalitie* (2d ed. 1634), Philip Camerarius, for example, collecting contemporary commonplaces, explains the "efficacie" of Satan over Eve by noting that "many Authors affirme that Serpents . . . desire the companie of women," that "all the rabbins are of this mind, that the devills . . . have great power over one's concupiscence and privie members," and that "Philo and the Hebrewes do say that the Serpent signifieth allegorically Lecherie."[5] The story begins there to shade not only into allegory, but into a widespread misogyny that blames Eve/woman for the Fall, no matter at what point her sexuality is activated. If she is not herself willingly seduced, she uses her sexual charms to get Adam to eat in his turn.

An even sharper sense of the context against which Milton wrote his paradoxical yet dignified version of the story of "Love unlibidinous" (5.449) can be gained from a glance at what the "sons of Belial," as he called the restored Royalists, made of this story. A French sonnet of Jean-François Sarasin, "Lors qu'Adam vit cette jeune beauté," was widely reproduced and translated from the 1650s on; it runs in part,

> Tho' *Adam* abounded with vigorous youth,
> Tho' Beauty and Wit did his person commend,
> *Eve* yet was dispos'd new Admirers to get;

[2] See Leonard ad loc 2.650–59. The description of "Hamartia" in Fletcher's *The Purple Island* (1633) is very close to Milton's; see Fowler ad loc.

[3] G. Watson Kirkconnell, *The Celestial Cycle: The Theme of Paradise Lost in World Literature with Translations of the Major Analogues* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1952. New York: Gordian, 1967), p. 427. Turner, *One Flesh*, p. 292, suggests Pordage's source may be da Salandra's *Adamo Caduto*, which makes explicit Satan's choice of a snake he had seen playing in Eve's bosom.

[4] Christopher Hill et al., *The World of the Muggletonians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983) pp. 25–31, 80, 85, 181.

[5] Philip Camerarius, *Meditations of Mans Murtalitie* pp. 145–6, quoted in Turner, *One Flesh*, p. 162.

> And, being a *Woman*, chose rather to lend
> Her ear to the *Devil*, than not to coquet.

The irreverent, cynical misogyny returns the story to a kind of debased Petrarchism, a literary fashion that was being actively repudiated by Milton in his own version of the story, as when he gives the extravagant language of Petrarchan praise ("Heav'n wakes with all his eyes, / Whom to behold but thee, Natures desire"; 5.44–45) to the angelic Satan of Eve's dream. By a marvellous stroke, when Eve is awakened by Adam from this dream in the language not of Petrarch but of the highly erotic Song of Songs, "Awake / My fairest, my espous'd, my latest found" (5.17–18), she is already blushing ("With tresses discompos'd, and glowing Cheek"; 5.10), and "with startl'd eye" speaks to him in their special language, beginning "O Sole," as if indeed there might have been another.

The story of Eve's seduction is not explicit in the biblical text, nor is it spelled out in *Paradise Lost*. But the reader can feel its pressure on the text. Satan's desire, for example, is clear in that remarkable cry when he catches sight of Adam and Eve making love in their garden: they are in love, "Imparadis't in one anothers arms," but Satan is in Hell, "Where neither joy nor love, but fierce desire" is his lot. (4.505–11). This passage identifies love itself as what Satan really misses or as what Paradise really means. It makes Satan quite literally into the archetypal voyeur, and gives as an immediate motive for the temptation of Eve sexual jealousy or frustration.

2. *"Stupidly good"*

But there is more to it. When Satan is looking for Eve, he suddenly comes upon her, alone. The moment can be read from both pro– and anti-Satan points of view, and is charged with the ambivalence of the poem. But what matters here is the closeness we are invited to experience, momentarily at least, to the Satanic seducer. So smitten is he with Eve's beauty that

> That space the Evil one abstracted stood
> From his own evil, and for the time remaind
> Stupidly good, of enmitie disarm'd,
> Of guile, of hate, of envie, of revenge.
>
> (PL 9.463–66)

"Stupidly good" is a resonant phrase that has been much commented on, and which reproduces the Satanic ambivalence. But what kind of word is "stupidly" here: is it primarily Latin or English, does it qualify mainly "Satan," or "good," and whose evaluation is it? The apparent implication is that Satan's nature is still drawn to love, but that his will is what drives him to revenge. For a brief moment his evil separates off, as Fowler comments ad loc; it is no longer his essential nature. As he stands there, he "recollects" himself, and

launches on another self-directed soliloquy, this time wonderingly, bemusedly addressing his thoughts as other:

> Thoughts, whither have ye led me, with what sweet
> Compulsion thus transported to forget
> What hither brought us, hate, not love, nor hope
> Of Paradise for Hell.
>
> (PL 9.473–76)

Hatred, then, is what his will tells him to practice, but his other, better, more unreflective self would allow him to love, even to hope he might somehow be admitted to this Paradise, not forced to spy on it like a lonely voyeur.

Which way should we read this? His response to Eve is, I think, the modern reader's (male or female): she is "the fairest of her Daughters" (4.324), and gives delight, but we are cut off from her by the intervening Fall: she is unreachable, like a figure in a painted landscape. Thus Satan, momentarily smitten, is sympathetic to us all, I suppose. Of course, he does not take the chance to give up his revenge, but insists on it the more in spite of his better nature.[6] He returns to that damned self with which he has now identified—and we should not miss the shift from private singular ("thoughts whither have ye led me") to that public plural ("What hither brought us"), reminiscent of the disdain he appealed to during the Mount Niphates soliloquy in Book 4 as a reason to give up his longing to repent. The moment of hesitation is characteristic in evoking both sides of the problem, and not resolving them.

His speech concludes with a characteristic moment in which it becomes hard, if not impossible to tell Satan's discourse from the poem's or Milton's. In broken or incomplete sentences, he gears himself up for the temptation by thinking again of Eve's beauty:

> Shee fair, divinely fair, fit Love for Gods,
> Not terrible, though terrour be in Love
> And beautie, not approacht by stronger hate,
> Hate stronger, under shew of Love well feign'd,
> The way which to her ruin now I tend.
>
> (PL 9.489–93)

[6] See Carey, "Satan," p. 139. Empson, *Milton's God*, p. 69, thinks that his better nature is still at work, since he "is still partly thinking of himself as a patron of Adam and Eve, who can save them from their wicked master; thus he seems genuinely indignant at hearing the conditions of ignorance which God has imposed upon them." But even Empson, victim of his own good nature, was too good a critic not to see the other side of the matter, since Satan quite explicitly says here that the prohibition is a "fair foundation laid whereon to build / Thir ruine!" (4.521–22). You can, writes Empson, "either shudder at Satan's villainy or take the offer as sincere, and feel the agony of his ruined greatness."

The chiastic repetition of "stronger hate, / Hate stronger" shows him talking himself up to the task, obliterating his better feelings with words, and succeeding.

But what of that curious moment a line earlier? Is it Satan, or Milton, speaking? If Satan, where did he learn the terror of love and beauty? Certainly not from Sin, or was it? Was that why he rebelled against God and the Son? As Flannagan (RM, n. 150, p. 599) puts it, "Does terror exist in love universally, or only from the perception of Satan, who knows only 'jealousie / . . . the injur'd Lovers Hell' (5.449–50)?" To ask the question is to answer it. Though Flannagan adds that Milton does not imply such a negative view of love and beauty, the comment about jealousy from Book 5 is definitely the Miltonic narrator's, not Satan's. Leonard well cites the Song of Songs 6.4: "Thou art beautiful, O my love . . . terrible as an army with banners." The resemblance to Sappho's comparison of the beloved to a parade suggests that the word "terrible" is less terrible here than is usual in English (it has a wider range of meaning in French). As in the various instances of free indirect style noticed in previous chapters, the effect is to bring us closer to Satan the seducer.

The implications of Eve's seduction, which may be working at various levels of consciousness, are also an undercurrent in the marital quarrel of Adam and Eve before Eve goes off alone for her fatal encounter with Satan. It is part of the danger that readers know Eve to be in—but it is important also that the story is repressed, held *in potentia*: to spell it out would vulgarize the poem and destroy the delicacy and beauty of the tension between this latent content, known or sensed by Milton's readers, and the play of minds at the intellectual level of persuasion and resistance.

3. *Sexual Serpents*

The story also helps to explain the sexiness of the Satanic-"spirited" (9.613) serpent.[7] The serpent images of the poem include, memorably, the lower half of the allegorical figure of Sin, born from Satan's head (so *that's* what it's like in there): she

> seem'd Woman to the waste, and fair,
> But ended foul in many a scaly fould
> Voluminous and vast, a Serpent arm'd
> With mortal sting: about her middle round
> A cry of Hell Hounds never ceasing bark'd
> With wide *Cerberian* mouths full loud, and rung
> A hideous Peal: yet, when they list, would creep,

[7] Flannagan (RM, n. 180, p. 604) points out that this usage of the word "spirited" (*OED* 4), to mean "inspired" was initiated by Milton. The parallel with Milton as poet is never far away from this scene.

> If aught disturb'd thir noyse, into her woomb,
> And kennel there, yet there still bark'd and howl'd,
> Within unseen.
>
> (PL 2.650–58)

The appeal of the Satan-serpent in Book 9 always has to work against this fearsome connection, and the passage reads as if Milton were deliberately evoking everyone's sexual-serpent depths—so that they can insinuate themselves later in the seduction narrative. One of the sources for this image, as we have seen, Phineas Fletcher's *The Apollyonists* (1627), has its half-woman, half-serpent "Sin" be the daughter of Eve by Satan. Milton suppresses such overtly misogynist links of Sin with Eve, but they come back, subconsciously, in these images.[8] Milton also establishes certain clear echoes of the incestuous figure of Sin, as we saw in the previous chapter, in the language he gives to Eve ("dalliance," "enamour'd," "attractive graces,") as also in their common birth from the left side of the male "parent"-lover).[9] Indeed, since Satan knows all about the Sin-serpent by the time he gets to Book 9, these links imply an unconscious motivation on Satan's part for choosing to enter the serpent.

In fact he makes himself as sensually attractive a serpent as he can: he

> toward *Eve*
> Address'd his way, not with indented wave,
> Prone on the ground, as since, but on his reare,
> Circular base of rising foulds, that tour'd
> Fould above fould a surging Maze, his Head
> Crested aloft, and Carbuncle his Eyes;
> With burnisht Neck of verdant Gold, erect
> Amidst his circling Spires, that on the grass
> Floted redundant: pleasing was his shape,
> And lovely, never since of Serpent kind
> Lovelier.
>
> (PL 9.495–505)

Then follows a typical Miltonic list of classical references to sexually interesting serpents, and their women: Olympias, the mother of Alexander the Great, said to have been loved by Jupiter in the form of a snake; or the mother of Scipio

[8] Kerrigan, *Sacred Complex*, p. 187. Sin, the "pefect image" of Satan, as she reminds him, is a "Snakie Sorceress" at 2.724, and at 10.352–53, she is his "faire / Inchanting Daughter," in the language of Renaissance romantic epic; see Merritt Y. Hughes, "Spenser's Acrasia and the Circe of the Renaissance," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 4 (1943): 381–99; Leonora Leet Brodwin, "Milton and the Renaissance Circe," *Milton Studies* 6. (1974): 21–83. For Eve as Circe, see 9.519–22, and chap. 8, above. For Eve as serpent, to Adam at least, see 10.867: "Out of my sight, thou Serpent!" (Compare the chorus's comment on Dalila's departure: "a manifest Serpent by her sting"; *Samson Agonistes* 997).

[9] PL 2.762–65, 819; 4.298, 338; V.13. See chap. 8, above, and Turner, *One Flesh*, p. 260.

Africanus, about whom a similar story was told.[10] Although Flannagan (RM, n. 154, p. 600) suggests that "Milton seems to be relying on classical and Christian gossip to construct a number of wild tales of relations between famous men and women and serpents in order to discredit pagan civilization for its superstitiousness," the presence of the snake's sexuality in the Garden itself, approaching Eve, suggests a much more immediate meaning. The threat of rape is muted to "rapine sweet," but with the echoes of Persephone and Pluto-Dis, it is there, and the narrative all the more gripping, threatening, fearsome. At the simplest level of narrative, we are hooked.

4. *Discourse*

The sexual charge of the narrative is for the most part sublimated in discourse. Thus the text works in a more complex, intellectually challenging way than the seduction tale I have outlined above, for the Satan-serpent speaks. Milton's treatment of this necessary theme is interesting in several ways. Adam and Eve have been warned to beware of Satan; they have been told all about the rebel's War in Heaven, but they have not been told to look out for talking snakes. Given a half-way intelligent Eve, and she is a lot more than that, the explicit warning would spoil the story.

Earlier interpreters had tried to explain why Eve is not suspicious of a snake that speaks.[11] Well, all the animals could talk before the Fall, ran one rabbinic line of thought, but this was not popular among the Church Fathers for lack of biblical evidence. In the Christian tradition, quite often, the Devil occupied the serpent or spoke through his mouth rather in the way that demons might speak through a possessed man—one among many instances of how the New Testament affected reading of the Old. Sir Thomas Browne, among others in the Renaissance, suggested that Eve might still be so new to life in Eden that she "might not yet be certain only man was privileged with speech" (*Pseu-*

[10] The story is a serpentine variant of the widespread theme, or type-scene, in which the hero's parentage is part-divine—what would otherwise be seen as an ordinary act of adultery. The same anxiety about origins, as well as more obvious sexual jealousy, is present, for example, in the variant told about Noah in the *Genesis Apocryphon*, one of the texts found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. Lamech, Noah's father, is suspicious, believing that his baby boy could not glow so much if he were not of angelic parentage. The suspicion leads to a long and emotional scene in which Lamech denounces his wife for infidelity with one of those cursed Watcher angels, causes of the Fall in this widespread Jewish tradition, and so parallel with the Satan figure in Milton. Lamech tries to get her to confess, but she swears that the seed was planted by Lamech and no Watcher angel or Son of Heaven. Unconvinced, Lamech gets his father, Methusaleh, to go and have a word with his father, Enoch, who by this time dwells with angels. Enoch is able to reassure him. Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, p. 214. Joseph makes a similar complaint about Mary in the apocryphal *Gospel of James*; the motif is common in medieval drama, such as the comic York play *Annunciation*.

[11] For this argument, and the quotations that follow, see J. M. Evans, *Genesis Tradition*, pp. 275–76.

dodoxia Epidemica 5.4). Calvin, however, had suggested that, although Genesis doesn't mention Eve's surprise, no doubt she perceived it to be extraordinary, and "therefore she greedily received that whereat she wondered" (*Commentary on Genesis* 3.3).

Milton adopted Calvin's version, as he often did, but with a clever variation. When she hears him address her, Eve asks

> What may this mean? Language of men pronounc't
> By Tongue of Brute, and human sense exprest?
> The first at lest of these I thought deni'd
> To Beasts, whom God on thir Creation-Day
> Created mute to all articulat sound.
>
> (PL 9.553–57)

Satan manages to turn this surprise to his advantage. Eve asks him how he learned speech—and to do so she uses a new word in the English language: "How camst thou **speakable** of mute?" (9.563; emphasis mine). Satan responds, with typical cunning, that he acquired the new power from eating the fruit of one of the trees hereabouts. Oh, she says, how interesting. Which one? Come, I'll show you, says he. When they finally reach the tree, Eve says, showing herself as capable as Satan or God of an appropriate pun (and well beyond poor Adam), "Serpent, we might have spar'd our coming hither, / Fruitless to mee, though Fruit be here to excess" (9.647–48); we are not allowed to eat just that particular tree, as it happens. But Eve is already, because of Satan's wily chat, in a state of frustrated expectation, ready to listen further to his words. Indeed her response shows it: not only can she pun on the word "fruit" but the pun itself is revealing.[12] That disappointed and personal "Fruitless to mee" is quickly followed by an implied accusation against nature: the tree has fruit "to excess." So the serpent's command of human language is, as Evans puts it, "the key to the whole temptation."

Eve has heard peculiar voices before, so we can understand her confusion: not only did Satan tempt her in a dream with a seductive speech, but her first experience of language was of a mysterious voice, warning her to turn away from her own image in the lake and seek him "Whose image thou art (4.472)."[13] The voice tells her, like the serpent's, to "follow me," and she comments: "what could I doe, / But follow strait, invisibly thus led?" (4.467–76). The source of this voice is not explicitly identified,[14] and the narrator is equally cagey about how the serpent speaks—"with Serpent Tongue / Organic, or impulse of vocal Air" (9.529–30). Indeed, the biblical commentators frequently discussed the problem.

[12] Discussion of the pun in Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style*, pp. 73–74, and Shoaf, *Duality*, pp. 144–53.

[13] See especially Diane McColley, *Milton's Eve*, p. 77, on Eve at the lake.

[14] At 8.485–86 Adam somehow knows it is God's voice, but at 4.712 it may be an angel's.

Satan first gets the idea of using reason and knowledge, that is, "discourse," to tempt Adam and Eve when he overhears them discussing the prohibition on the tree and learns it is "One fatal Tree . . . of Knowledge call'd." He reacts with apparently genuine indignation (in soliloquy):

> Knowledge forbidd'n?
> Suspicious, reasonless. Why should thir Lord
> Envie them that? can it be sin to know,
> Can it be death? and do they onely stand
> By ignorance . . .?
> . . . Hence I will excite thir minds
> With more desire to know.
>
> (PL 4.514–23)

And he doesn't change that part of his strategy on finding Eve alone. She is assumed, like Adam, to be eager for knowledge (even if she prefers astronomy from Adam himself). Satan's whole temptation, overtly (though of course he flatters her), is rhetorical persuasion, not sexual seduction.

Eve says to Adam afterwards that he could not

> have discernd
> Fraud in the Serpent, speaking as he spake;
> No ground of enmitie between us known,
> Why hee should mean me ill, or seek to harme.
>
> (PL 9.1149–52)

This is a serious argument. Indeed, it is Satan who teaches her to "discern," as the course of the scene shows. True, he uses some of the weapons of magic, such as the tradition of forbidden knowledge—to tempt her—but notice how he puts it: the tree gives power, he claims, "to discerne / Things in thir Causes" (9.681–82). This impresses Eve, as her own musing confirms (note the word "discern" in the following passage, at the climax of a rising series)

> In the day we eate
> Of this fair Fruit, our doom is, we shall die.
> How dies the Serpent? hee hath eat'n and lives,
> And knows, and speaks, and reasons, and discerns,
> Irrational till then.
>
> (PL 9.762–66)

So what has most impressed her, as this speech shows, is the serpent's ability to develop rational arguments, in particular rational arguments about words, to **dis**cern or **dis**criminate their meanings. God said, "In the day ye eat thereof ye shall surely die," and by showing Eve he is not dead himself, though he has supposedly eaten it, Satan has got her to think about that text, to interpret and divide its meanings, to rewrite it.

> So shall ye die perhaps, but putting off
> Human, to put on Gods, death to be wisht,
> Though threat'ned, which no worse then this can bring.
>
> (PL 9.713–15)

She now refers the power of the word to Satan rather than God, or reads God's Word as if it were Satan's. In a sense the Satan-serpent here shows himself to be the first literary critic, that peculiar species that loves to replace the words of the primary text with its own, clarifying, language; quickly he teaches Eve to be one, too. Satan's presence is as much textual as sexual.

5. *The Seductive Text*

Satan, thus, is implicated in the mysterious origins of voice, of language itself, and so in the production of the poem. Indeed, he can, we have just seen, take over the power of God's Word. Milton deliberately exploits these parallels: like Eve, we risk confusing Satan and the Christ who is God's Word. Milton invents the wonderful episode in which Satan induces a dream in the sleeping Eve's consciousness; he makes up a splendid fiction, a mini-poem in itself, for the Satan-serpent to tell Eve about how he discovered the inspirational virtues of the forbidden fruit ("I was at first as other Beasts that graze / The trodden Herb, of abject thoughts and low, / As was my food, nor aught but food discern'd/ Or Sex"; 9.571–74);[15] and he has Satan explicitly enter the sleeping serpent via the mouth. At the beginning of this same book, Book 9, the Milton-narrator places his most exact account of the process of writing, describing how the divine Muse

> deignes
> Her nightly visitation unimplor'd,
> And dictates to me slumbring, or inspires
> Easie my unpremeditated Verse.
>
> (PL 9.21–24)

So Satan's new form as a snake is parallel to the bemused poet. Here, perhaps, it is easy enough to tell the differences, even though the parallels (Eve flying high in her dream like the poet-narrator) are clearly deliberate, but in certain other cases it is rather more difficult, and more is at stake.

Paradise Lost opens with an invocation in which Milton aligns himself with Moses, and which invites the spirit who "from the first / Wast present," who "Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss / And mad'st it pregnant" to preside now over the creation of the poem as once over the writing of Genesis and the Creation it records. The unnamed spirit of the Creation becomes

[15] The oral and sensuous delights of this speech are compared by A. D. Nuttall to those of Marvell's "The Garden" and Keats, *Alternative Trinity*, p. 113.

Christ explicitly in Book 7, where the Creation itself is imagined in some detail. As the voice of God, Christ performs the creative act, and Milton thus exploits the standard Christian parallel between poem and world. But this creation is actually a suppression of other voices:

> Silence, ye troubl'd waves, and thou Deep, peace,
> Said then th' Omnific Word, your discord end.
>
> (PL 7.216–17)

The silencing of others' noise alludes to the Neptune of *Aeneid* 1, whose rising above the storm is compared in a famous simile to a powerful politician silencing the turbulent mob. Fowler's note on the passage compares Death's Neptune role ("As with a Trident smote"; 10.295) in the building of the highway over Chaos from Hell to Earth after the Fall.

Just as we find the power of Sin and Death in that passage "Hovering upon the waters," so the creating Spirit of God has "brooding wings" (7.235) to "outspread" on "the waterie calme" and to act on "the fluid Mass" of Chaos (7.234–37). The language obviously echoes the invocation to the whole poem, but it also recalls Milton's description of himself, at the beginning of the same book, as following the Voice divine "Above the flight of *Pegasean wing*," upon "this flying Steed unrein'd, (as once / *Bellerophon*, though from a lower Clime)" and he begs to be let down gently lest "on th' *Aleian* Field I fall / Erroneous there to wander and forlorne" (7.4–20). The analogy here is not only with the classical story of Pegasus, but with the winged and fallen Satan of earlier in the poem. And the poem, as part of its own potential subversion, projects this analogy as one to be feared, not desired.[16] A series of parallels, for example, links the two "hymns" that open Books 3 and 4, one to Light, the other to the Sun, one by Milton, the other by Satan, and the similarities threaten to disappear in identity: this makes it especially interesting that the first question Milton asks of "holy Light" is "May I express thee unblam'd?" (3.3)

It is perhaps easiest to see how the text of the poem itself reflects and incorporates this uneasy relationship if we return to the seduction scene itself. Satan approaches Eve, we have seen, dressed to kill as a sexy snake, and impresses her with his power of speech, his discourse. As he comes close to her, and gets her to notice him, he twists and turns physically in the way his speech does rhetorically: "and of his tortuous Traine / Curld many a wanton wreath in sight of *Eve*" (9.516–17).[17] He is likened in one of those typically negative

[16] See chap. 3, above. On this whole subject see Riggs, *Christian Poet*, pp. 15–45, and Kerrigan, *Prophetic Milton*, pp. 184–87, who argues in psychological terms for Milton's fear that his Devil will be only "a self-portrait drawn in perfect likeness to the hidden image of himself." Kerrigan fully explores the parallels of poet and Satan, pp. 142–59.

[17] The word "wanton" occurs several times in the poem, as we saw in chap. 3.5; it is used in an oddly innocent way for the "wanton growth" of Eden at 4.629, and for Eve's "wanton ringlets"

catalogs ("never since . . . , not those . . . ") to various classical snakes who loved mortal women and produced heroic offspring. The next lines, including the last of the hero-list, Scipio Africanus, repay careful acrostic reading: Jove transformed himself into a snake

> with her who bore
> ***S**cipio* the highth of *Rome*. With tract oblique
> **A**t first, as one who sought access, but feard
> **T**o interrupt, side-long he works his way.
> **A**s when a Ship by skilful Stearsman wrought
> **N**igh Rivers mouth or Foreland, where the Wind
> Veres oft, as oft so steers, and shifts her Saile;
> So varied hee . . .
>
> (PL 9.509–16; boldface mine)

The "side-long" approach is reproduced if we read the text sideways: the letters S-A-T-A-N begin the five lines starting with Scipio's name.[18] Satan himself is not named elsewhere in the temptation, as Leonard points out. If George Herbert had made acrostic poetry into a kind of sacred hieroglyph, relating poetry to the "omnific word" itself, Milton here implies the opposite: Reader beware! This text has Satans hidden in it. At the very moment then when Milton's poem comes as close as it ever does to admitting, by allusion, the sexuality of Satan's relation to Eve, his relation to the reader becomes almost purely textual.

When he addresses her for the first time, as in the earlier dream, Satan becomes a parody, but a lethal one, of the Renaissance poet, he who wrote in the Petrarchan-Ovidian tradition responsible for some of the most beautiful secular love lyrics in the language.

> Wonder not, sovran Mistress, if perhaps
> Thou canst, who art sole Wonder, much less arm
> Thy looks, the Heav'n of mildness, with disdain,
> Displeas'd that I approach thee thus, and gaze

(4.306), but at 1.453–57 we find the "wanton passions" of "*Sions* daughters" amid the "dark Idolatries / Of alienated *Judah*." See Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style*, p. 112, Evans, *Genesis Tradition*, pp. 247–552, and Fish, *Surprised*, esp. p. 93, who argues that it is the fallen reader who brings its sinister meaning to the innocent usages. For the wreath, see Flannagan's note on 9.517 (RM, n. 158, p. 601).

[18] Paul Klemp, "Now Hid, Now Seen", *Milton's Quarterly* 11 (1977) 91–92. Some readers have refused to accept that this is more than an accident! Compare the argument that precedes the text of Ben Jonson's *Volpone, or The Fox*: feigning and temptation are the topics of the play and anticipated in the acrostic, which also "weaves / Other cross plots," *Volpone*, ed. Alvin B. Kernan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), p. 35. Oddly the Yale notes offer no comment whatsoever, perhaps on the assumption that all is obvious, and beneath discussion.

> Insatiate, I thus single, nor have feard
> Thy awful brow, more awful thus retir'd.
>
> (PL 9.532–37)

Like the typical aristocratic lover, he tries to disarm "disdain," a standard affliction of the aristocracy; he makes her his "sovran Mistress," eventually his god (the repeated "awful"); he flatters her with a clever pun; and excuses the boldness of his address by the power she has over him. The language is that of sexual seduction. As Kerrigan remarks,

> The world of the narrator, including the literary world of the English language, belongs to Satan. He is the father of human evil, and evil belongs to literature. The sacred poet lives among latter-day "revellers", compassed round with evil tongues. . . . The audience of "barbarous dissonance", banished from the verse of God, can exalt the devil as their own true poet.[19]

Milton himself, by a contrast that he works into the text of the poem at various times, is the poet not of Cavalier revels, but of those associated with "Wedded Love." In the famous hymn that he addresses to this substitute goddess, "Haile wedded Love, mysterious Law, . . . " (4.750), he even allows Cupid, or Eros, to come to the shrine:

> Here Love his golden shafts imploies, here lights
> His constant Lamp, and waves his purple wings,
> Reigns here and revels; not in the bought smile
> Of Harlots, loveless, joyless, unindeard,
> Casual fruition, nor in Court Amours,
> Mixt Dance, or wanton Mask, or Midnight Bal,
> Or Serenate, which the starv'd Lover sings
> To his proud fair, best quitted with disdain.
>
> (PL 4.763–70)

The fit reader, at least, will be likely to remember this language of disdain when it is repeated by Satan for his flattery of Eve. But he may also recall that, when Milton addressed "holy Light," in an invocation of which Satan's address to Eve is a parody, he also asked whether it was possible to approach "unblam'd."

If lyric poetry has become Satanic, epic poetry, it appears, began in Hell when the more musical devils, at a loose end, started singing "With notes Angelical . . . / Thir own Heroic deeds," and there, too, as critics in the eighteenth century were already aware, the text reproduces what the devils do:

[19] Kerrigan, *Prophetic*, p. 136. The overlapping of devils and poets has a long history: for citations from Justin Martyr to an anonymous *Panegyrico por la poesia* of 1627, see Ernst Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1979), p. 557.

> With notes Angelical to many a Harp
> Thir own Heroic deeds and hapless fall
> By doom of Battel; and complain that Fate
> Free Vertue should enthrall to Force or Chance.
> Thir Song was partial, but the harmony
> (What could it less when Spirits immortal sing?)
> Suspended Hell, and took with ravishment
> The thronging audience.
>
> (PL 2.548–55)

The word "suspended" means "riveted the attention of the audience" (*OED* 5a), but also what the text does: as Thomas Newton pointed out in 1749 (Leonard ad loc), the parenthesis "suspends as it were the event." The more philosophically inclined devils soon follow, and enclose themselves in a philosophical Hell that is reproduced by the chiasmus, so the text itself becomes that maze:

> Others apart sat on a Hill retir'd,
> In thoughts more elevate, and reason'd high
> Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will and Fate,
> Fixt Fate, free will, foreknowledg absolute,
> And found no end, in wandring mazes lost.
>
> (PL 2.557–61)

The second time through the list of abstractions, the text adds adjectives as it repeats them in inverse order, and so these devils, damned as they are, cannot get back to Providence, or out of their textual Hell. What all of this shows is that the text of the poem, at times, reproduces the seductive, inveigling kind of discourse that Satan (or his followers) attempt within it.

6. *Commentators*

So do the commentators. The text of Book 9 is especially charged with Satan's presence. And it is here that Milton's editors most obviously feel the need to defend Milton, or God, or reader, against the Satanic challenge. The longest notes in critical editions of *Paradise Lost* or *Paradise Regain'd* are often the ones that take issue with Satanic readings, or explain the flaws in Satan's arguments. Fowler's first Longman edition (1968) reads as if it was inspired by the felt need to respond to Empson's 1961 challenge to Miltonic orthodoxy, and though Fowler himself is by no means an orthodox critic (he dabbles in highly esoteric numerological criticism for one thing), it is certainly true that many of the most interestingly digressive notes are the ones provoked by Empson's pro-Satan (or rather anti-God) challenge to the Christian system. This is another reason that leads me to call the poem "the Satanic epic," since so many of its readers, Christian or not, have responded to it in that way, and the critics have

revealed themselves (and the power of the poem) most clearly by their notes and comments on Satan. The narrator calls, at the opening of Book 9, for a warning voice, and the commentators step forward to respond. They miss the point: the narrator is himself that voice, but in the wrong time—the reader's present. When it was needed, for Eve, the voice was unheard.

Take, for example, commentary on the remarkable sequence in Book 9 in which Satan returns to Eden and eventually enters into the body of the serpent as his chosen vehicle for the temptation of Eve.[20] The narrator warns the reader several times that this is indeed Satan and that he is not to be trusted. He begins Book 9 by telling us that, instead of the friendly talk of angel and guest, he "now must change / Those Notes to Tragic" (9.5–6). Satan is "improv'd/ In meditated fraud and malice, bent / On mans destruction" (9.54–56). The images support the warnings. He enters Eden "involv'd in rising Mist" (9.75), then again is "wrapt in mist / Of midnight vapor glide obscure" (9.158–59); and at 9.180, he is "Like a black mist low creeping." Other warnings soon follow: Satan looks for a creature that might "serve his Wiles," and chooses "The Serpent suttlest Beast of all the Field" (9.85–86; the language of Genesis is repeated). When he finally enters the serpent he is, unusually, named as "The Devil" (9.188). Furthermore, in the long and splendid speech that precedes this "foul descent," as he calls it himself (9.163), he reiterates his evil intentions, as for example: "onely in destroying I find ease / To my relentless thoughts" (9.129–30).

In spite of these clear indications from the narrator and Satan himself, some commentators feel obliged to add to the warnings, or with subtle reading of allusion show just how subtle this serpent (and this text) really is. Roy Flannagan (RM, n. 45, p. 587), for example, in his recent, thorough, and enormously helpful edition, comments severely: "The forced alliteration may indicate the falsity of Satan's passion." Yet this is not Satan's own alliteration, unlike those obnoxiously jokey lines he speaks during the War in Heaven, but the epic narrator's lead-in to Satan's speech: "His bursting passion into plaints thus pour'd" (9.98). If that alliteration is forced, what alliteration isn't? Perhaps the critic is misled by the unconscious (?) play in his own language on "forced" and "false."

But Alastair Fowler gets even more heated, and finally loses his way in allusive subtlety. On the words, "his final sentence chose / Fit Vessel, fittest Imp of fraud, in whom / To enter" (9.88–90), Fowler comments (and his proliferating biblical allusions signal a need to protect Milton's text from Satanic intrusion):

[20] Genesis requires this, but the interpretive tradition had made it much more problematic: see, for example, the Greek version of "The Adam Book," known as the *Apocalypse of Moses*, 17.1, and discussed in Evans, *Genesis Tradition*, p. 57, and Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, p. 233. Note also the English version in the second volume of J. H. Charlesworth's *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1983–86). The text seems uncertain whether Satan is serpent or angel.

> Highly ironic, for it is only the divine potter who chooses vessels, "one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour" (*Rom.* ix 20–4; cp. *Acts* ix 15, *2 Tim.* ii 21). The implication is that the final sentence on the serpent and on Satan will be that they are "vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (*Rom.* ix 22). . . . an imp is a shoot or slip, so that the serpent is fraud's scion or extension. The image implies that from the little slip represented by the serpent the Fall will grow and a whole new tree (world) of evil. There is possibly an allusion to St. Paul's use of grafting as a symbol of Incorporation in Christ in *Rom.* xi.

This is fascinating, but perhaps a bit too subtle (highly ironic, then?), decidedly complicated as allusion and as meaning (imp as shoot or slip, and working in an allusion to a bit of Paul's murky theology of incorporation).[21] As Fowler allows, it was Patrick Hume, one of those early eighteenth-century editors of Milton so well resuscitated by Ricks, who first noted the horticultural implications of that imp, though Fowler thinks he got it the wrong way round: fraud is not grafted onto serpent stock, but serpent is the scion of fraud.

Flannagan (RM, n. 42, p. 587) is even more certain, without grappling explicitly with either Hume or Fowler.

> The word [imp] here does not represent the modern sense of "mischievous little devil" but the seventeenth-century gardening usage of "slip to be grafted on a tree." Here Satan grafts himself on the Serpent, or possesses his body, "imping" the Serpent; the notion of demonic possession may be at work. . . . Unlike his other appearances as lion, toad, cormorant, or whatever, here he joins with another being in a parody of the Incarnation.

This is clearer than Fowler's complex presentation. But why be so single-minded about the imp? Why shouldn't "imp" have both meanings? The so-called modern meaning of imp was well-attested in the seventeenth-century: the *OED* documents the progression of the word from "slip" or "shoot" (fourteenth century already) to the figurative "child" already in the fifteenth century, specifically a "child of the devil" in the sixteenth century (e.g., Stubbs, "An Impe of Sathan," 1583) and shows that in the seventeenth century it was often used for the witches' familiar.[22] The earliest use in the sense Flannagan calls "modern" is 1642, about "six Irish children . . . wicked young imps . . . none of them above eight year of age," to which usage Hughes calls attention ad loc. So the whole range of meanings may be present in *Paradise Lost*, with their range of implications, so to speak. The snake is the right

[21] As often, Fowler's second edition modifies his note, but here leaves all the allusions intact; indeed, he now calls the imp a travesty of Paul's doctrine of engrafting, not merely a possible allusion.

[22] John Leonard's recent Penguin edition confirms this: he has no time for the Fowler-Flannagan complications, citing simply the two 4a and 4b meanings in the *OED*.

vehicle for the job, better than any other potentially fraudulent animal, but may still be innocent and fit for the kingdom of heaven, like the children in Christ's various discourses—or at least not himself fraudulent, as Fowler's version of the gardening image suggests, until Satan possesses him and he becomes ripe for punishment. The unfairness of that punishment has occurred to most people who think about the morals of this old myth, and that includes most theologians. Milton's solution, which is no more satisfactory than Fowler's or Flannagan's, is to tell us the serpent is "vitiated in Nature" by the possession, but then to take refuge in mystery (10.173, "mysterious terms, judg'd as then best").

So why did Milton go to such trouble to introduce a patently unsatisfactory version of an old theological dilemma at one of the key dramatic moments of the poem? We should not miss the further point of Flannagan's interesting comment, that Satan's entering the body of the serpent is a parody of the Incarnation. In fact, Satan shows himself to be quite self-conscious about his decision to descend the chain of being in this way:

> O foul descent! that I who erst contended
> With Gods to sit the highest, am now constraind
> Into a Beast, and mixt with bestial slime,
> This essence to incarnate and imbrute,
> That to the hight of Deitie aspir'd.
>
> (PL 9.163–67)

Richard Bentley, an eighteenth-century classical scholar and early editor of Milton (1732), had the quaint theory that, like many classical texts handed down in manuscript, the text of *Paradise Lost* was hopelessly corrupt because Milton was blind and had not been able to read the proofs. So Bentley corrected the poem. In commenting on this passage, he complained about one word in particular—"incarnate." "Milton," he writes, "would not use thus the word *incarnate*; he knew a higher essence than seraphical was afterwards incarnated" (i.e., Christ).[23] Bentley has been useful to more recent commentators on Milton because he manages so clearly and so resolutely to miss the

[23] Quoted in Empson's essay on "Milton and Bentley" in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1935), p. 165. See also Evans, *Paradise Lost IX and X*, p. 17. Ricks comments that

> Milton maintains the Grand Style, and also the necessary distinction between the epic itself and the characters in it. They are permitted to say things that would be indecorous for the epic writer in his own person. On this depends the success of *incarnate*, as applied by Satan to himself in the snake . . . [A]bove all it is the silence of the context which makes the word effective—any nudge from the poet would have been fatal to the Grand Style. (*Milton's Grand Style*, pp. 72–73).

For further discussion of Bentley, see Robert M. Adams, *Ikon: John Milton and the Modern Critics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1955), and Frank Kermode, "Adam Unparadised," in *The Living Milton*, ed. Kermode (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), pp. 85–123.

point. Here, of course, the parallel and contrast is being deliberately drawn between Christ and Satan—"incarnate" points the parallel, while "imbrute" a nonce word, points the contrast.

I am not aware of any other poet who exploits this parallel, but it is typical of Milton's way of telling the story: he sets up the whole drama as a contest between Christ (or the Son) and Satan, just like the sequel, *Paradise Regain'd*, and this opposition works at many levels. The central theological problem of the whole Christian religion—how could the figure Christians worship be both God and man?—Satan both imitates and parodies, and so calls into question. And the text in which he does so is both serpentine in its shape and, like the doctrine of the Incarnation, open to various readings. Milton's text, far from taking the invented parallel lightly, reproduces Satan's troubled, hesitant thinking as he prepares to enter into the body of the serpent, his "foul descent" on the scale of being. Satan comes upon

> The Serpent suttlest Beast of all the Field.
> Him after long debate, irresolute
> Of thoughts revolv'd, his final sentence chose
> Fit Vessel, fittest Imp of fraud, in whom
> To enter, and his dark suggestions hide
> From sharpest sight.
>
> (PL 9.86–91)

As Peter Weston well puts it, "starting the line and the sentence with the object, 'him' (the serpent), has the effect of a finger pointing, and the heavily stressed first words two lines later, 'fit vessel', force a contrast between the positive decision and the long irresolute debate beforehand."[24] That is fine close-reading, attending to the poetry and not trying too hard to warn the reader off. And consider that word "sentence" also, since it has an interesting double-meaning (judgment, group of words) and at the same time, in view of what will soon happen to Satan as punishment in the metamorphosis scene in Hell, an ironic power of which Satan is as yet unaware—he is indeed choosing his sentence just here.

The passage continues with those same "dark suggestions" of Satan. These thoughts are constructed, first in indirect thought, then in what theorists of fiction call "free indirect style," that narrative resource that often has the effect of mingling narrator, character, and reader,[25] inviting us inside the thought of the character (Satan) as he works it out, clause within clause, and decides on the snake:

[24] Peter Weston, *Paradise Lost*, Penguin Critical Studies (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), pp. 7–8.

[25] Anne Banfield, *Unspeakable Sentences*, pp. 65–68; see also chap. 2, n. 4, above. On fictional techniques for the representation of consciousness, see Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978). I have found no commentator on this passage who notices the usage.

> for in the wilie Snake,
> Whatever sleights none would suspicious mark,
> As from his wit and native suttletie
> Proceeding, which in other Beasts observ'd
> Doubt might beget of Diabolic pow'r
> Active within beyond the sense of brute.
> Thus he resolv'd . . .
>
> (PL 9.91–97)

Key markers of *style indirecte libre* are the absence of the narrator's "he said" or "he thought" or the equivalent, and the shifted tenses, from present to past, or from "will" to "would." In this case, we have an early and relatively inchoate instance of the style. The long sentence begins with the standard markers of indirect style, in this case "chose" (9.88; see the previous quotation), but after the colon, it continues with no such marker, a sign that the indirect style has become "free." Even in this preliminary form its effect is troubling, mingling the supposedly distinct voices of narrator and Satan. Only with "Thus he resolv'd" is the distinction clearly re-established.

Evans well contrasts Milton's language with that of a theologian, in this case Augustine, who argues in part that the serpent

> was suited for the task because it was a slimy and slippery beast that could slither and twist on its tortuous way. So, subjecting it to his diabolical design by the powerful presence of his angelic nature and misusing it as his instrument, he at first parleyed cunningly with the woman as with the weaker part of that human society, hoping gradually to gain the whole. He assumed that a man is less gullible and can be more easily tricked into following a bad example than into making a mistake himself.[26]

Quite apart from the implied sexism here, for which the Genesis text offers no obvious warrant, Evans points out that, whereas Augustine's position is that of a moralist, Milton's is a poet's: "The tempter's strategy is conceived from the inside out rather than vice versa." Milton indeed thinks how to make narrative art convincing, mainly through what critics of prose fiction have learned to call "the representation of consciousness," and in this whole sequence succeeds admirably.

7. *"What delight"*

There follows a splendid soliloquy in which, before he actually makes the "foul descent," Satan addresses and praises the Earth; but again some of our guides are there to warn us off. Unless we are strong enough to resist the

[26] Evans, *Paradise Lost IX and X*, pp. 16–17, quoting from Augustine, *City of God* 14.11, trans. Gerald Walsh et al. (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1958), p. 306.

warnings, we may not notice just how moving is the speech that Satan pronounces here. Indeed, if the speech is read out of context, not as Satan's, would anyone notice what the commentators feel obliged to point out? It is as thoughtful a celebration of the Earth as any in the period, reminiscent perhaps of *The Compleat Angler* (1653) or Marvell's Mower poems, or even "The Garden,"[27] yet more inclusive:

> O Earth, how like to Heav'n, if not preferr'd
> More justly, Seat worthier of Gods . . .
> . . . . . .
> . . . As God in Heav'n
> Is Center, yet extends to all, so thou
> Centring receav'st from all those Orbs; in thee,
> Not in themselves, all thir known vertue appeers
> Productive in Herb, Plant, and nobler birth
> Of Creatures animate with gradual life
> Of Growth, Sense, Reason, all summ'd up in Man.
> With what delight could I have walkt thee round,
> If I could joy in aught, sweet interchange
> Of Hill, and Vallie, Rivers, Woods and Plaines,
> Now Land, now Sea, and Shores with Forrest crownd,
> Rocks, Dens, and Caves; but I in none of these
> Find place or refuge; and the more I see
> Pleasures about me, so much more I feel
> Torment within me.
>
> (PL 9.99–121)

Of course, the passage as poetry might be open to T. S. Eliot's charge that none of this is really visualized, merely named. And indeed the responses of C. S. Lewis, Bernard Bergonzi, Christopher Ricks, Douglas Bush, and others will not really do; namely, that Paradise is a special place for which the distance of this ritual style is appropriate, that human beings like what is artificial since they like art, and that epic poetry favors this remoteness. At least these responses will not do here, for they would miss the real power of the passage, which is that this marvellous appreciation of the pleasant earth as center of all

[27] Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World* (Harmonsdsworth: Penguin, 1983), pp. 252–62, shows how much the period was changing the more traditional attitudes to nature and the hierarchies theology imposed on it. See now Karen Edwards's fine book, *Milton and the Natural World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), which argues for Milton's up-to-date "experimental [i.e., scientific] reading of the natural world" (47). Before they are symbolic, Milton's plants and animals belong "geographically and historically to the whole world" (151). Nonetheless urban nostalgia for the countryside was becoming a potent force, and shows itself as a powerful ingredient in the "Paradise lost" Milton imagines. This was also the period in which landscape painting began to develop as a popular genre: indeed the word "landscape" comes into the language as a translation of French *paysage* in descriptions of painting (*OED* 1).

that we see is imagined in the mouth of one who cannot live there, who is inevitably denied its beauties. I don't think it helps much to belittle Satan's emotions; rather it prevents us from entering fully into the spirit of the poem, for we, too, should be able both to respond to these beauties, like Wordsworth, and to know, or fear, we have lost them. Nor should we forget that Milton had to great extent lost them, for he was blind. Eliot's remark, that the most important fact about Milton was his blindness, was not only uncharacteristically vulgar, but further was insensitive to what the verse was about. But we do indeed need to remind ourselves from time to time, not to denigrate, but to admire the more.

Many commentators, though, add their warnings. We must not read these lines straight. Hughes in his usual style refers to a scholarly article, by Grant McColley from the 1937 *PMLA*, in which he shows how the idea of a geocentric universe could take "a bigotedly obscurantist form in works like Alexander Ross's *The New Planet* (1649)," but then quotes from that work nothing that sounds remotely bigoted, but rather simply repeats the standard wisdom of the period: "The wise God placed the earth in the midst . . . chiefly that man with all other animal and vegetable creatures might by an equal distance from all parts of the heaven have an equal comfort and influence; what place more fit for conservation than that which is in the midst of the world? . . . all the powers of the universe uniting together in the earth, as in a small epitome." The astronomy may be wrong there, but in our ecologically sensitive age, the ethics do not sound so obscurantist. Fowler calls Satan's a perverse form of the geocentric hypothesis since it becomes an occasion for pride. Try as I might, I see no pride here, only regret. Of course Satan is proud elsewhere, and even talks himself back to pride as the speech goes on ("To mee shall be the glorie sole among / The infernal Powers, in one day to have marr'd / What he *Almightie* styl'd, six Nights and Days / Continu'd making"; 9.135–38), but I see no reason to deny him his and our sense of the beauty that is soon to be destroyed.

Flannagan (RM, nn. 45, 48, p. 587) adds to his comment about the forced alliteration by comparing the previous address to the sun (yet there Satan told us straight away that he hated its beams), and suggests that "Satan pictures the universe as geocentric, but in terms which suggest that humankind should feel egocentric as well." Evans, too, though he allows the speech is "a poignant tribute to God's handiwork," still insists that, as Satan describes the universe, "his perversity begins to reassert itself." Even Empson in *Milton's God* loses all sympathy now and says his praise of the beauty of the world is used by Satan merely to argue that the world ought not to have been made for such inferior persons (70). Leonard, to his credit, avoids all this, contenting himself with repeating Fowler's comparison of the Renaissance commonplace that "God is an infinite sphere, whose centre is everywhere, whose circumference nowhere," and pointing out, rather more aptly perhaps, that "Satan's celebration of earth's

beauty carries a melancholy echo from Hell: 'Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, and shades of death' (2.621)." The fact that this is the narrator's description of Hell as seen by the other angels, and that Satan had already left by then, should not trouble us too much, since at least Leonard captures the mood more accurately than the other commentators. And at least his comment allows for the necessary ambivalence of Satan and reader. And perhaps even for the pleasure or delight in our "sweet interchange / Of Hill, and Vallie, Rivers, Woods . . . ".

8. *Satan's Sewers*

A parallel moment occurs a little later with the famous simile for Satan in which suddenly, at the moment when the great temptation of Eve is to begin, Milton invites all his readers to enter and identify with Satan by comparing him to an ordinary city-dweller who strolls out into the country one summer's morn and meets a fair virgin:

> As one who long in populous City pent,
> Where Houses thick and Sewers annoy the Aire,
> Forth issuing on a Summers Morn to breathe
> Among the pleasant Villages and Farmes
> Adjoyn'd, from each thing met conceaves delight,
> The smell of Grain, or tedded Grass, or Kine.
> Or Dairie, each rural sight, each rural sound;
> If chance with Nymphlike step fair Virgin pass,
> What pleasing seemd, for her now pleases more,
> She most, and in her look summs all Delight.
>
> (PL 9.445–54)

There is absolutely nothing in the simile, taken by itself, to remind us of Satan's evil intentions, and the commentators will have a hard time finding the flaws.[28] The famous simile is recalled by Wordsworth, for example, at the

[28] As Turner, *One Flesh*, p. 261, has it, "Satan thus joins a series of characters in Milton's poetry who are ravished at a distance by the ideal woman—the poet in love with Emilia, Comus entranced by the singing of the Lady, the poet awe-struck by the singing of Leonora. Each of these scenes enacts a paradigm of the function of poetry and the possibility of a redeemed sensuousness." The references are to Sonnets 2 and 3, *Comus* 244–64, and the Latin poem "Ad Leonoram Romae canentem," 4–10. Dennis Burden, *Logical Epic*, pp. 60–62, sees Comus's response entirely as a paradigm of delusory and Satanic poetry, but Turner compares *Comus* 552–64, the good spirit rescuing the emotion previously accorded to Comus. The Romantics made much of this paradigm, whether in Wordsworth's "Solitary Reaper" or in Coleridge's damsel with a dulcimer, but in each case they may be seen as coping with the loss of the Muse convention, as is Keats with his nightingale. Milton's relation with his Muse is deliberately made parallel to these Satan passages, as we have been noticing; cf. Kerrigan, *Prophetic*, pp. 156–57.

opening of *The Prelude*, which extends the end of *Paradise Lost*, but makes the new I-hero, because of that remembered simile, Satan-like:

> escaped
> From the vast City, where I long have pined
> A discontented Sojourner—Now free,
> Free as a bird to settle where I will.
> What dwelling shall receive me? in what vale
> Shall be my harbour? underneath what grove
> Shall I take up my home? and what clear stream
> Shall with its murmur lull me into rest?
> The earth is all before me: with a heart
> Joyous, nor scared at its own liberty,
> I look about; should the chosen guide
> Be nothing better than a wandering cloud,
> I cannot miss my way.
>
> (*The Prelude* 1.6–18)

The Romantics thought themselves easily into Satan's consciousness, and many of them (for a while at least) identified with him as an eloquent revolutionary. It is not a very big step from Wordsworth's reminiscence of Satan here to Byron's dramatized Cain, Shelley's Prometheus (or Byron's for that matter), or even to Mary Shelley's splendidly ironic reworking of all this Romantic admiration and self-consciousness, not least her husband's, in that nameless monster who has now so overwhelmed her contemporaries' Miltonic creations to the point that he dominates our literary consciousness.[29]

Fowler, like all the commentators, ignores the Worthsworthian reworking,[30] but is quick to warn the reader against an Empsonian reading. One has, he says "to be a very devoted member of the devil's party to stop short at sympathy with the townsman's need for a holiday and his appreciation of beauty—without reflecting how mean it would be for him to take advantage of the country girl's innocence." He wants to make sure we don't just enjoy Satan's view of Eve in the Garden, we have to evaluate, evaluate. And of course we wouldn't "take advantage" of her, would we? The very idea! But why, then, does the critic need to remind us of our better nature?

Flannagan (RM, n. 137, p. 598), on the other hand, helpfully reminds us that Milton himself moved out of London to Chalfont St. Giles while he was

[29] Peter Lovesey, in *The Vault* (London: Little, Brown, 1999), p. 225, one of the myriad spinoffs from *Frankenstein* that still retain the strong connection with Milton, comments: "I can't fathom how it has become a set text in university English courses, but apparently it has, here and in America. An article in *The Times* stated that Mary Shelley is more studied than Coleridge, Byron, Keats and Shelley"

[30] Lucy Newlyn explores the London-as-Hell parallels, "'In City Pent': Echo and Allusion in Wordsworth, Coleridge and Lamb," *Review of English Studies* n.s. 32 (1981): pp. 408–28.

writing the poem. Both commentators refer to "Elegy 7," one of the early Latin poems, which recounts Milton's youthful encounter with just such a young virgin on a country walk, but one whom he deeply regretted never seeing again. That part of the poem is powerful and deeply passionate. Reader (at least Wordsworth as reader), Milton, and Satan all have parallel experiences, and there seems little point in denying it. Fowler admits he was inclined to do so "at first," but gradually accepted the parallel, at least with "Elegy 7," if not with the reader's experience of Paradise, and Eve. So perhaps it is not quite so heinous to admit to a certain devotion to the Devil's party. Milton seems to have done his best to help us join.

Indeed, there is considerable overlapping with the observing Satan in this passage. The line that precedes the simile could apply equally to Satan, to "Solomon" (for the passage alludes to the Song of Solomon) and to Adam: "Much hee the Place admir'd, the Person more." (9.444; Fowler ad loc, Ricks 135–38). And the final line of the virgin simile, "in her look summs all Delight," Flannagan (RM, n. 139, p. 598) takes as referring to Eve, "a little Garden of Eden in herself" (and "Eden" means "delight"), even though it is not until the next line that the narrative switches back to her: "Such Pleasure took the Serpent to behold / This Flourie Plat, the sweet recess of *Eve* / Thus earlie, thus alone" (9.455–57). If country virgin, Eve, and the Garden are all merged here, then the "recess," too, has obvious sexual implications. No wonder the sight of all this beauty, "her Heav'nly forme / Angelic, but more soft, and Feminine," and so forth (9.457–58) renders Satan "Stupidly good, of enmitie disarm'd" (9.465). Although Bentley, in his wonderfully clumsy and literal way, pointed out that if Eve were really softer than angels she would melt, the effect of the whole passage is to draw the reader very close to Satan's perspective.

9. *Satanic Verses*

The commentators tend to cluster in their anxiety around the Satan of Book 9 because they are aware of the problem, the satanic text, that Milton there dramatizes. Satan teaches Eve to read. She thinks through the sacred text, the prohibition, and makes it mean something different from what it had originally seemed to mean. Already there was minor variation when she quotes it back to Satan,[31] and by the time she falls, it has lost its authority completely. Christianity is the religion of the word, and yet Satan has put distance between the key terms, the relationship of God to word. In so doing, he has undermined the word itself. The word may be God's, but it is not always to be

[31] As in Genesis 3.3, Eve refers (9.651) to a prohibition against even touching the fruit, though the prohibition itself was only against eating (Gen. 2.17). Is Eve reinforcing her determnation, or admitting the attraction, or both? Some biblical commentators thought she was unwarrantably adding to God's precept, but Fowler ad loc thinks Milton is using the two versions of the prohibition indifferently: at 9.925 Adam, too, speaks of the "banne to touch" (when it is too late), and so does the epic voice at 7.46 ("Charg'd not to touch the interdicted Tree").

trusted. Milton, in his role as the narrator, fears that, without the constant and sustaining presence of the Heavenly Muse, he may fall (a vital word throughout the poem) from his flying steed, "Erroneous . . . to wander and forlorne" (7.19–20).

If we glance at what Milton wrote about the Bible in *De doctrina Christiana*, we can see why. For this radical Protestant, who claims allegiance only to the Bible and its word as sacred, even that bedrock of the word is fallible, and may, in the act of being written down, have gone wrong. "Apparently not all the instructions which the apostles gave the churches were written down, or if they were written down they have not survived" (586), he allows, and then goes even further, to argue that Scripture, "particularly the New Testament, has often been liable to corruption and is, in fact, corrupt. This has come about because it has been committed to the care of various untrustworthy authorities, has been collected together from an assortment of divergent manuscripts, and has survived in a medley of transcripts and editions" (587–88). Recognizing this, Milton was driven, like many other Protestants, to argue for "a double scripture," to distinguish the external Scripture of the written Word from the internal Scripture of the Holy Spirit engraved upon the hearts of believers (587). This separation will produce in the reader of Scripture both great confidence and gnawing anxiety, probably in equal measures. It accounts for the poet's complex relationship to the Muse, allows for Eve's rereading, and misreading, of Scripture, and establishes the gap between meaning and significance that Satan fills, or exploits.[32]

And if this sounds like the issues raised during the Rushdie affair, that is partly because the Christianity Milton knew had been through the Reformation, a similar crisis of the meaning of the sacred word.[33] It caused major rifts within and beyond the Church in something like the way that *The Satanic Verses* has made all of us acutely aware of what is at stake "in good faith." Christianity has no single equivalent of those deceptively straightforward verses that Islam finally rejected from the Qur'an, but which if taken seriously, as Rushdie does, would call into question the whole of the doctrine of divine inspiration;[34] no single equivalent, yet the whole of the Reformation in the writings of Erasmus or Luther, especially, is a record of a similar process of doubt, sometimes cool, sometimes anguished.

Maurice Kelley calmly points out that, whereas earlier Reformed theo-

[32] For these terms, see E. D. Hirsch, *The Aims of Textuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 1–13, 79–81; for a critique, see Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 256–80.

[33] Richard Waswo, *Language and Meaning in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 213–83.

[34] Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988), pp. 110–24, 363–70, and "In Good Faith," in *Imaginary Homelands* (London: Granta Books, 1991), pp. 393–414. The Star sutra is the one in question, Qur'an 53:19–21. See Martine Hennard-Dutheil, *Origin and Originality in Rushdie's Fiction* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999), pp. 157–212.

logians took the more sensible view that some of the canonical writings had been lost, Milton's contemporaries believed in the integral perfection of the Bible: the assembly as well as the dictation of Scripture was the work of God. Milton held to the older view, well aware of the textual irregularities and corruptions uncovered by Erasmus or Beza and ready to exploit them in his case against the orthodox view of the Trinity.[35] He was also ready to offer his own Latin versions of the Biblical proof-texts he used, as when he demonstrated that the name "god" can be given to angels in Scripture, and cited Psalm 8.5, *minorem diis*, less than gods, even though the AV reads "lower than the angels."[36] Rewriting the Qur'an as a novel, which is one of the motivations for Rushdie's marvellous book, is blasphemy (though not in English law). However much Rushdie may understandably have tried to retreat from that position in subsequent writings in an effort to cool everyone down, it is, within the terms of Islam, blasphemy. It was not necessarily blasphemous for a Milton to rewrite Scripture as epic, as he does in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regain'd*, but there are times when he knows he risks it: he asks anxiously of the holy Light he apostrophizes, "May I express thee unblam'd?"

[35] Maurice Kelley, ed., *De doctrina Christiana* (YP 6.44–45.
[36] John Carey, "Translator's Preface" (YP 6.xiv–xv).

TEN

"IF THEY WILL HEAR"

My heart was in my knee
But no hearing.
—GEORGE HERBERT

The high point of *Paradise Lost* as the Satanic epic is the entanglement with the text that I have attempted to show is our experience of Book 9. Yet it is one of the paradoxes of the poem that, in the very aftermath of Satan's success, the poem manages to detach itself from the dominance of Satan, and continues thereafter as a very different, and what some readers find a much duller, poem. The change happens in Book 10. The two plots, divine and earthly, linked in Book 9, now diverge, and we see by contrasts. While Satan returns in triumph to Hell, Adam and Eve endure the shame of a visit from the Son himself, who descends to pronounce their doom (judgment) and the serpent's. Once Book 10 is over, the poem becomes what C. S. Lewis memorably called "an undigested lump of futurity."[1] (I do not agree with that assessment of the last two books, and think it is largely the presence of Satan that readers miss.)

The new focus, we gradually become aware in reading Book 10, is no longer the power of the Satanic temptation, but a contrast in its effects: Satan's damnation against the eventual regeneration of humankind. The presence of Satan is still necessary to the understanding, but it is our distinction from Satan, no longer our similarity, that the reader is invited progressively to experience. This does not happen instantly, and the similarity needs to be there in order for the difference gradually to emerge. The poem now dramatizes the contrast in those succinct, harsh words of God's that I analyzed in the introduction:

> The first sort by thir own suggestion fell,
> Self-tempted, self-deprav'd: Man falls deceiv'd
> By the other first: Man therefore shall find grace,
> The other none: in Mercy and Justice both . . .
> (PL 3.129–32)

There is little Mercy for "both" sorts here; we have to reconnect "both" to God's allegorical virtues, Mercy and Justice, before it makes sense. Nonetheless

[1] C. S. Lewis, *Preface*, p. 129. Extensions of Lewis's view are reviewed by Loewenstein, *Drama*, p. 176–77, n. 3.

Origen, whose telling of the myth I showed in chapter 1 to be so influential for later Christians, believed the Devil, along with all other moral beings, would eventually be saved. For this heresy (*apokatastasis* is its technical term) he was condemned and posthumously excommunicated. Milton had read Origen with sympathy, but as Book 10 shows, could not agree with him on this doctrine. Indeed, to enhance the emotional power of the Mercy (for mankind), he now insists on the Justice of Satan's damnation, even gloats over it. What matters now is how it is done, and how the reader perceives the difference.

The underlying combat in the poem, that between Son and Satan, now becomes distinctively a struggle for the soul of mankind. We experience the struggle as Adam and Eve themselves do. But Book 10 also offers a dramatic picture of the opposing sides through the different fates of the two. Satan's fate is told in extensive detail. And though the Son seems to be present only as Judge, Adam and Eve in fact experience him also as the Word, as source of one of the most significant and succinct versions of the combat myth, the language of Genesis 3.15 about seeds and serpents. The point is whether or not they are able to hear the Word.

To hear would likely be, for a blind poet, an act of special import, and so, too, the word itself. In *Paradise Lost* the earliest chronological event, as we have seen, is announced with God's solemn

> Hear all ye Angels, Progenie of Light,
> Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Vertues, Powers,
> Hear my Decree, which unrevok't shall stand.
>
> (PL 5.600–602)

And the question is often raised how words are heard, whether it be through Satan's response to this decree, the attentive hearing that Adam and Eve grant to Raphael and each other, or the puzzled surprise of Eve's "How cam'st thou speakable of mute?" (9.563). Remembering that Milton must himself have heard, not read, the poem, and that he hopes not for a fit readership but "audience" (though few), we should attend to the implications of "hearing" in *Paradise Lost*.[2] Adam, for example, bewails the echoing song that Paradise had been: "O Woods, O Fountains, Hillocks, Dales and Bowrs, / With other echo late I taught your Shades / To answer, and resound farr other Song" (10.860–

[2] For T. S. Eliot, the necessary "readjustment of the reader's mode of apprehension" towards the "auditory imagination" was chiefly an indictment of "the limitation of visual power" and Eliot's consequent difficulty "to see very clearly any scene that Milton depicts" ("Milton I," in *On Poetry and Poets* [London: Faber, 1957], pp. 138–45). Blindness is not the only factor: ideological differentiation may go back as far as *Comus* between the Royalist, or Anglican, preoccupation with the eye (appearance, beauty, ritual), and the Puritan priority on the ear (sermons, the Word), associated with the Attendant Spirit and the Lady.

62).[3] And recall the mysterious voices that Eve hears (first God, but she doesn't know that, then Adam, then Satan in her dream, imitating Adam). Adam, too, hears voices, in his own dream and on awakening. And the narrator, as we have seen, hears the not-Muse who inspires him and dictates to him nightly his unpremeditated verse. In the last chapter I showed how closely that voice and Satan's were related.

I take the most emotionally interesting episode of this hearing of voice to be the regeneration scene in Book 10 showing Adam and Eve emerge from that terrible despair. Among other things, it turns out that to hear fully and deeply means, as God explains, to be able to get to the desired end. In a subtle and far-reaching argument, Georgia Christopher scorned what she called the "romantic notion that it is Eve's love that leads Adam back to God."[4] Her argument drew heavily on Luther and Calvin, suggesting that in the light of their works and of Milton's own conservative Puritanism, "the notion that woman's love can lead man to love of God appears sentimental." (So much for the Platonic tradition of *Il Cortegiano* or *The Faerie Queene*.) "Eve's loving gesture of reconciliation" Christopher found "far more self-serving than self-less," and argued it "has no direct bearing upon Adam's return to faith." Instead Eve's suggestion of a double-suicide serves, if anything, only to jog Adam's memory about the Promise of Christ, that Eve's "Seed shall bruise / The Serpents head" (10.1031–32), and in the memory of those words is the beginning of man's restoration. This is an excellent theological point. But when we are told that *only* Adam's memory of the Promise is important, that the emotional context is irrelevant, then we have grounds for protest against so exclusive a doctrine. It misses those interesting human aspects of the scene through which Adam and Eve become capable of hearing anything but their own woe.

The reader will remember how Book 10 is constructed. Christ pronounces the Sentence on Adam and Eve, including the Promise that came to be called the *protevangelion* about the painful effects of seeds on serpents' heads. This Promise Milton interprets not, in fact, as Calvin had, that it referred generally to the righteous, the seed of woman, and the reprobate, the seed of Satan (or the children of Abel, Seth, and the children of Cain), but in the more tradi-

[3] For the Garden as musical instrument where birds sing and airs (in both senses) attune the trembling leaves, see 4.264–66; see also William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, pp. 156–57, on this "serious, secret pun," and the quotation from the 1695 editor, Patrick Hume adduced by Christopher Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style*, p. 106: "all Musick, either Vocal or Instrumental, is but the beating and breaking of the Air."

[4] Georgia Christopher, "The Verbal Gate to Paradise: Adam's 'Literary Experience' in Book X of *Paradise Lost*," *PMLA* 90 (1975): 69, partly reprinted in *Science*, pp. 163–72. These romantics include E.M.W. Tillyard's "classic essay" entitled "The Crisis of *Paradise Lost*," in *Studies in Milton* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1956) and Joseph Summers, *The Muses' Method* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

tional or Catholic way that it referred specifically to Mary's seed, Jesus, and his triumph over Satan (10.182–192).[5] After this sentence, the Son leaves, and Milton backtracks to tell us about what Sin, Death, and Satan have been doing. This is the scene of Satan's return to Hell, where the curse on the Satan-serpent begins to be fulfilled, and then Sin and Death begin their work, introducing "Discord first / Daughter of Sin" (10.707–8) and "growing miseries, which *Adam* saw / . . . but worse felt within" (10.715–17). Then Adam, as Milton's "Argument" puts it,

> heavily bewailes, rejects the condolement of *Eve*; she persists and at length appeases him: then to evade the Curse likely to fall on thir Ofspring, proposes to *Adam* violent wayes which he approves not, but conceiving better hope, puts her in mind of the late Promise made them, that her Seed should be reveng'd on the Serpent, and exhorts her with him to seek Peace of the offended Deity, by repentance and supplication.

Many of those "Arguments" (the summaries that were written at the request of the publisher for subsequent printings), have a rather bloodless feel next to the poem itself, and this one would certainly give us little idea that, for example, Adam rejects the condolement of Eve by that famous and anguished cry "Out of my sight, thou Serpent" (10.867). But Christopher might well have adduced this "Argument," for it clearly stresses the Promise about the revenge of the Seed on the Serpent, and it contains no hint, pace Joseph Summers,[6] that Eve is presented as a type of the Redeemer. It does, however, place the "late Promise" in the human context, the dialogue between husband and wife.

If we do try, nonetheless, to read Book 10 in the light of Luther and Calvin, we will immediately be struck by a curious fact. It actually takes 862 lines of text from the time when Christ issues the Promise to the moment, buried in the middle of a speech, at which Adam remembers it. The gap between the giving and the hearing of the Promise is filled, at the human level of action, with the most emotionally intense scene in the entire poem. The emotional changes through which both Adam and Eve shift are profound and exhausting, but however romantic it may seem, it is only when Adam has already abandoned his own despair, when he has relented towards Eve, and when he is actually trying to comfort her and talk her out of her "vehement despaire," only then that he begins to hear the Promise concealed in Christ's Sentence. He has changed, and so he can now reinterpret or reread the language of the Sentence.

Meanwhile, the poet has invited us to contemplate, with God, the ironic

[5] Arnold Williams, *The Common Expositor* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1948), pp. 128–29.

[6] Summers, *Muses' Method*, pp. 176–83. This is a sensitive reading of what he calls the "voice of the redeemer."

change of Satan into his chosen serpent shape—ironic because it is no real change at all. And he has made us listen to Satan's last sound as he drops out of the poem: he says "bliss" and we hear that last sound extending itself from Satan's mouth through all the fallen angels as "A dismal universal hiss" (10.508). This scene (10.460–584) is an invention of Milton's. Satan the literalist tells the story of his success, "and the more to excite your wonder, with an apple"—a word only Satan uses.[7] Then comes the long description of the transformaton into snakes. Regularly but temporarily every year, we are told, they will all be so metamorphosed. Why "this apparently pointless annual humiliation"?[8] It is partly just the baroque artist's pleasure in creaturely metamorphosis, a sign of homage to Ovid's example, perhaps also an allusion, as Thomas Corns suggests, to the punishment of several among the now-defeated parliamentary party, who had to come back every year, like prisoners on parole, and be carried on a hurdle to the place where they would have been executed. The transformation also reverses the order of our first impressions of Satan as he moves gradually from "infernal Serpent" to angel,[9] and it insists on the continuing power of God, even in Hell, something the devils had doubted in their earlier speeches. (And one may ask that awkward and unnswerable question, why all the devils are punished as serpents when it is only appropriate for Satan.) The main reason for the length of the scene, however, is not any of these, I think, but the need for a long passage so the reader forgets the Sentence, as Adam does.

If we now ask ourselves how change occurs in Adam, but not in Satan, we discover, as is usually the case, that the poem supplies its own explanation, although the implied theology is rather different from Luther's or Calvin's. At the beginning of the next book, stepping back from the action, the narrator tells us something he has omitted from the close-up of Book 10. The book begins:

> Thus they in lowliest plight repentant stood
> Praying, for from the Mercie-seat above
> Prevenient Grace descending had remov'd
> The stonie from thir hearts, & made new flesh
> Regenerate grow instead.
>
> (PL 11.1–5)

[7] The Latin for "apple," as we have seen in chap. 6, p. 196, is *malum*—another reason why the splendid serpentine hiss is "dismal" (10.508). The word's Latin etymology is *dies mali* (day of evil), used several times in the poem, at 1.60 for Hell, for example, or at 9.185, for the places serpents usually live, and again at 10.787. It contributes to the irony of Satan's story.

[8] Corns, *Regaining*, pp. 33–34. Regarding the complicated monsters of this scene, including the *amphisbæna*, Karen Edwards informs us about the scientific contexts in *Milton and the Natural World*, pp. 85–98.

[9] See chap. 6.9, above.

Immediately the Son is discovered "presenting" to interpret this regeneration before his Father's throne.

> See Father, what first fruits on Earth are sprung
> From thy implanted Grace in Man.
>
> (PL 11.22–23)

The Son thus presents to God what the narrator has just presented to the reader, and invites him to see and hear:

> Now therefore bend thine eare
> To supplication, heare his sighs though mute;
> Unskilful with what words to pray, let mee
> Interpret for him.
>
> (PL 11.30–33)

God accepts the plea, and so the circle of "hearing" is now complete: from God's decree, it moves through Christ's Sentence, Adam's and Eve's reception of it, the Son's (literally) hermetic interpretation, God's response. The parallel invites the reader/audience to respond likewise. What would this involve?

Among the various roles offered to the reader in this speech, the most interesting for critics has usually been that of interpreter. Yet as the poem (and the tradition) implies, this Christ-like role means playing both man (here Adam and Eve) and god. Nor may we ignore the parallel God himself draws in his reply: he will not hide from his audience (the angels) "how with Mankind I proceed, / As how with peccant Angels late they saw" (11.69–70).

The terms used in this presentation scene ("implanted Grace" that "remov'd / The stonie from thir hearts") refer back to God's speech in Book 3.[10] We learned there that God's grace will "soft'n stonie hearts" (3.189) and that he will place within mankind as a guide

> My Umpire *Conscience*, whom if they will hear,
> Light after light well us'd they shall attain,
> And to the end persisting, safe arrive.
>
> (PL 3.195–97)

In that same speech, Milton's God also tells Calvin how wrong he was about Predestination, and appears to insist on the freedom of the will: "Man shall not quite be lost, but sav'd who will," though he adds, being Milton's God, a graceful pun: "Yet not of will in him but grace in me / Freely voutsaft" (3.173–75). God's little game with the grammar and semantics of "will" poses a serious theological dilemma: he seems to give, and then to take away, human

[10] C. A. Patrides, *Christian Tradition*, pp. 198–214. Flannagan (RM, n. 3, p. 659), however, points out that this is Arminian rather than Calvinist doctrine.

responsibility for salvation.[11] There is an obvious parallel with the problem in critical theory of how much freedom a reader may exercise in his response to a text, and indeed, by the structure of his scene, Milton seems to have borne it in mind. The regeneration scene in Book 10 and its interpretation in Book 11 are dramatic presentations of the theological (and critical) paradox.

If we read Book 10 in this light, then, we realize that Adam's memory of the Promise that is mysteriously contained within Christ's Sentence is a sign of, but also a part of, a longer process of transformation that includes the emotional and psychological preparation of despair, contrition, and reconciliation between man and wife. This process ends with Adam wondering whether God will teach them how to build a fire, and with Adam and Eve penitent and together. More theologically speaking, what Adam hears is the voice of God's Umpire, "whom if they will hear" (3.195) they may reach the end. Man's will, again, is a necessary precondition for "hearing," and the regeneration scene may be read as an illustration of how, with a snoot at Calvin, men and women become "willing." But what Adam hears physically is the voice of Eve. How different from what Satan hears: his own hiss endlessly reproduced!

The pithy pronouncements of God in Book 3 have the advantage over the theological writings of Luther and Calvin in that they occur within the same poem as Adam's hearing of Eve. They may nonetheless seem almost equally remote to a reader caught up in the drama of Book 10. Indeed, the desperate hatred, the pleadings, the suicidal longings of Book 10 could scarcely be imagined if one tried to reconstruct from Book 3 what God's regenerative activity might feel like. And Milton waits until the next book, after the regeneration scene is over, before he reminds us of the theory of Grace. In fact, this is the longest scene in the entire poem in which Adam and Eve are alone together, undisturbed by either heavenly or hellish visitants. And not only does Milton leave them alone to work their way through the emotional tangle of bitterness and distrust produced by the Fall, but his narrator, for the first time in the poem, refrains from making ex cathedra pronouncements to the reader: we are (temporarily) free from the nudging or correction of the narrator.

Before we go on to explain this absence of either heavenly or editorial intrusion in Milton's own terms, we might recall that he had some precedent for this scene, particularly for the way the voice is heard, not in Luther or Calvin, but in their own great predecessor, Augustine. One of the remarkable characteristics of Augustine's account of his conversion in the *Confessions* is that he is able to describe his moment of crisis underneath the fig tree in language that is almost entirely psychological and emotional, although he believes that the inner experience of repentance and regeneration depends completely on the Grace of God. He describes a voyage through his own mind,

[11] Maurice Kelley, "The Theological Dogma of *Paradise Lost*, III, 173–202," *PMLA* 52 (1937): 75–79.

though the goal of the voyage is not within his mind at all. He knows, too, that the strength he finds to complete the journey derives not from himself: it comes only at the moment of greatest personal weakness, when he has abandoned himself entirely.

An important change took place in Augustine's understanding of God's plan at about the time he wrote the *Confessions*. He had been reading Paul's epistles in the light of Ambrosiaster's commentary. When he read in Romans 9, "that Jacob was loved and Esau hated when they were not yet born and had done neither good nor evil," he became convinced that election to Grace and the refusal of mercy were prior to any decision on man's part. Though he struggled to retain the idea that conversion was an act of the human will, he was forced to admit that whether and when a man turns to God was not entirely at his own disposal. In a contemporary letter to Simplicianus he uses the phrase "congruiter vocatur," arguing that conversion takes place only when man is called in a way suited to his condition, and that is a matter of divine prearrangement.[12] It was probably this new understanding, paradoxically, that led Augustine to give such extraordinary importance to the fig-tree episode in Book 8 of the *Confessions*, even though he had not mentioned it in his previous writings. It was the moment of "congruence" with God, but only in retrospect did he so understand it, and when he describes the moment itself, he reimagines the emotional experience: the despair, then the mysterious change, and the child's voice chanting "Tolle, lege" (take up and read).

The Augustinian theory of Grace permeates both Catholic and Calvinist theology, though with very different emphases (efficacious grace, effective calling), and it appears also in Milton's more Arminian "Prevenient Grace descending" (11.3). For Milton as for Augustine, the experience of regeneration depended on the accession of God's Grace: a man's will was necessary but not sufficient for salvation. And, for the Arminian Milton, man could always accept it, or not. Yet both Satan's dramatic inability/refusal to repent on Mount Niphates and the contrasting scene in Book 10 are ultimately the result of a prior decision by God: "Man therefore shall find grace / The other none" (3.131–32).

Stated as baldly as that, however, the doctrine of God's Grace and his "Umpire *Conscience*" might well have led a less subtle poet to that faulty use of the deus ex machina that Aristotle attacks in the course of his discussion of probability and necessity:

> It is apparent, then, that the solution of plots ought to happen as a result of the incidents themselves, and not from the *mechane* as in the *Medea* or in those incidents in the *Iliad* [2.155–181] concerned with the "sailing-home." The *mechane* should rather be used only in connection with those

[12] Eugene Teselle, *Augustine the Theologian* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), pp. 39, 178. See Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, pp. 409–18.

> incidents external to the drama, either those which arise before the incidents of the plot and which are not the kind a man would know, or those arising later which need foretelling or announcement, for it is to gods that we give the power of seeing all.[13]

Milton obviously followed Aristotle's recommendations to the letter. He admits to his poem those incidents that arise before and are not the kind a man would know (Raphael's account of the War and Creation), and those that happen after and need foretelling (Michael's speech). Both are given to supernatural creatures, for "it is to gods that we give the power of seeing all." But the crucial moment of human conversion, what Aristotle called the peripeteia or reversal, is made to arise not by a deus ex machina but "as a result of the incidents themselves." The narrator at this point takes us steadily through the conversation: his own comments (Eve falls at Adam's feet, her cheeks are "Dyed with Pale") are more like stage directions than those corrections of our perception they have often been previously. The scene develops more like drama than epic narrative poetry, more so than any other scene in the poem. Finally we are allowed, without the narrator's discipline, to follow a scene after the mode that Aristotle recommends for drama, by means of the simple "arrangement of the incidents." Any suggestion of divine, or even editorial, intrusion or omniscience would distract from the human drama that for the first time in the poem can be directly and correctly experienced. The episode has a human self-consistency, and the change, miraculous as it may well be in the theological perspective, simply follows the ordinary and credible course of human emotions. Thus Milton manages to avoid the objectionable connotations of that very word "Umpire" (*impar*). Only later are we invited to review the scene with God and discover, as Augustine had, the workings of Grace. Just so, Adam can "hear" the Promise only when he has calmed down and started listening to Eve.

There is a more interesting reason for this manner of presentation, however, than Milton's wise desire to follow Aristotelian precepts. For Milton differs in at least one crucial respect from Augustine (as well as Luther and Calvin). In his treatise *De doctrina Christiana* and in Book 3 of *Paradise Lost* he takes a position close to the Arminian and stresses the freedom of the will. No doubt the paradox of Grace and free will is an endless conundrum: we have already noted the ambiguity of God's syntax in Book 3. But in Book 10 of the poem, though there is perhaps no theological disagreement with the treatise, the difficulty is handled differently. Following Aristotelian principles, if not only for Aristotelian reasons, Milton offers a dramatic solution of a theological issue. Arguably the poem is more theologically subtle than the treatise, since, while the treatise simply juxtaposes the restoration of mankind and the regain-

[13] Aristotle, *Poetics* XV (1454 b); translation mine.

ing of free will,[14] the poem demonstrates that the freedom of Adam and Eve to repent is itself the experience of Grace. Milton leaves the reader free to hear the regeneration of Adam and Eve as an apparently psychological and unconstrained process before the epic machinery cranks back into action and we move to the divine perspective from which we may reinterpret the human drama.

One aspect of this divine view has, however, been available to the reader throughout the scene, not by explicit comment, but through the implied contrast with Satan. It is not only God who insists on the parallel in his response, for Adam's own language has suggested it. Indeed, the scene is made to form a deliberate pair with Satan's soliloquy on Mount Niphates. Satan, we recall, wails "Me miserable!" (4.73) and complains of the abyss into which he plunges, "And in the lowest deep lower deep / Still threatning to devour me opens wide" (4.76–77), while Adam concludes himself ("thee miserable"),

> To *Satan* only like both crime and doom.
> O Conscience, into what Abyss of fears
> And horrors hast thou driv'n me; out of which
> I find no way, from deep to deeper plung'd.
>
> (PL 10.841–44)

Adam's address to the Umpire means, in the light of Book 3, that he has heard and is being heard: Satan, as we saw, though he seems for a moment to address God, "O then at last relent" (4.79), is, in fact, appealing only to himself: he is not free to address God (who is always "he") and so repent. Only submission would allow him repentance and pardon, "and that word / *Disdain* forbids" him (4.81–82). Adam, however, has another voice whose appeal he can hear: Eve begs him "Forsake me not" (10.914) and reminds him of Christ's Sentence, that enmity and hatred is to be against that cruel serpent, not "On me alreadie lost, mee then thy self / More miserable" (10.929–30). She ends "weeping" and Adam "soon his heart relented" (10.940).

If we listen to the poem's theology, then, this is the decisive moment. Like Augustine's tears beneath the fig tree, Eve's tears at the feet of Adam (10.909–13; 936) are desperate, and lead her to contemplate a double-suicide. But Adam's voice, like the child's voice heard by Augustine, shows her another resolution. Similarly, Eve's presence, her appeal to him, has its effect on Adam, and at the end of Book 10, both are "humbly" and "with tears / Watering the ground" (10.1089–90) beg pardon. It is because Eve seeks his aid (10.943–44) that Adam relents, loses his anger, and "with peaceful words" upraises Eve and reminds her of the Promise contained in the Sentence. What Satan, alone and damned, cannot hear, Adam and Eve, together in solitude, eventually receive.

[14] Milton, *De doctrina Christiana* (CM 14.131–35; YP 6.495–97).

It is in this way, so emotionally intense, that the reader is finally allowed to detach himself from the Satanic perspective.

The change is remarkable, and emotionally persuasive. Adam's first response to Eve's soft words is full of hate and disgust:

> Out of my sight, thou Serpent, that name best
> Befits thee with him leagu'd, thy self as false
> And hateful.
>
> (PL 10.867–69)

The speech continues to identify Eve with Satan in various ways; it ends with the idea of a man's wife as "a fell Adversarie, his hate or shame" (10.906). Yet at this very moment when Adam makes the identification, Eve does what Satan had not done on Niphates' peak: she falls "humble." Adam at his worst—hateful, selfish, egocentric, base in his blame of woman—Adam at his weakest evokes a nobler side of Eve, and the scene begins to turn. Adam denounces Eve and all women ("this fair defect / of Nature" (10.891–92), imagining that God made Heaven's inhabitants all masculine, and wishing it were the same on Earth. But he then takes away the force of his own argument by bewailing the problem of fallen marriages, not that all women are bad, but only those to whom one is married. (Milton's biography clearly obtrudes itself here, recalling his own divorce tracts.) Eve's response, however, turns the mood; as Flannagan (RM, n. 302, p. 652) comments, she is practicing what is embodied in the phrase "A soft answer turneth away wrath" (Proverbs 15.1). She begs him not to forsake her, blames herself, and appeals to him as "My onely strength and stay" (10.921). It works, especially the sight of Eve "at his feet submissive in distress" (10.942). The narrator is clearly sympathetic to him here, but when he himself starts to speak the impression is rather different. He still denounces her, though in less stringent terms, and insists on her inferiority: "ill able to sustaine / His full wruath . . . / And my displeasure bearst so ill" (10.950–52). And he forgives her in the same breath as he reminds himself of her inferiority: "Thy frailtie and infirmer Sex forgiv'n" (10.956). Eve has set this up by the terms of her own speech, and by her physical attitude, and the male in him (as D. H. Lawrence might put it) is appeased, and touched. He returns to his earlier agony about death, but now with that wonderful phrase "A long days dying" (10.964) resolving the apparently false statement of God's that "In the day ye eat thereof ye shall surely die."[15]

Eve then proposes a solution to that problem, as well, either sexual abstinence, or if that is too hard, suicide (10.1001–2), since she wants rather to spare their descendants the pain of dying. Even as it seems to get worse, as Eve

[15] Eve's reflection at the moment she is about to eat it (9.762–63) is the closest the poem gets to repeating exactly the words of Genesis 2.17. For the reinterpretation of the law within the poem, see Jason P. Rosenblatt, *Torah and Law in Paradise Lost* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 16–19.

suggests this double suicide in "vehement despaire" (10.1007), the transformation has begun. The "despaire" is vehement, not languid or enticing like Spenser's or "infinite" like Satan's. Adam finally relents, refusing the suicide-pact idea, and recognizes that Eve's motives are nobler than Adam's when he had initially contemplated suicide:

> *Eve*, thy contempt of life and pleasure seems
> To argue in thee something more sublime
> And excellent then what thy minde contemnes.
>
> (PL 10.1013–15)

The key to their transformation, as to Augustine's under the fig tree, is their weakness: Eve as Adam's "weaker," as Raphael had called her, the one who now sheds the tears that for Augustine marked the moment of greatest anguish, but also that when grace can be admitted. To use Augustine's curious expression, it is the moment of "congruence" when God and man agree and the call is heard. At their extreme, human hate and weakness can become their opposites, whereas Satan's remain unchanged. Satan is condemned to that which he made a boast of, "A mind not to be chang'd by Place or Time" (1.253). As the narrator explains in Book 4, Satan "nor from Hell/ One step no more than from himself can fly / By change of place" (4.21–23). It is at the same time as we watch Adam and Eve reacting to the Sentence—and discovering the power to change—that Satan disappears rather ignominiously from the poem, trapped in the serpent form that he has willfully adopted. Thus the structure of Book 10, alternating the two consequences of the Fall, reproduces the basic opposition of the poem and of the combat myth, the contrasting activity of the two protagonists.

The poem now moves towards its end while Adam, under Michael's tutelage, gradually comes to understand what the Promise means. This contrast suggests one more clue to the meaning of the conversion scene. It allows all of us, though not the endlessly punished enemy, to get out of the poem. God, we recall, promised that mankind would be able not only to hear the Promise through conscience, but also, through persisting, to come safely to the end.

What the poem offers the reader of Book 10, I have argued here, is the experience, rather than the doctrine, of Grace as freedom. Augustine, after all, had already understood the idea of Grace as an intellectual concept before his emotional breakdown. The additional complexities introduced by Milton's stress on free will only make the theoretical difficulties in his doctrine of Grace that much more insoluble, and his discussion of the intellectual implications in the *De doctrina Christiana* are no more satisfactory than other such reasonings. But curiously enough, Milton has even included those problems in the experience of *Paradise Lost*. Recall that splendid image of philosophical dreariness in Book 2, those intellectual devils who

reason'd high
Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will and Fate,
Fixt Fate, free will, foreknowledg absolute,
And found no end, in wandring mazes lost.

(PL 2.558–61)

What is denied to those doctrinal devils is available to Adam and Eve, and to the reader who persists, "long wanderd," until the end of the poem.

Consider further the chiastic syntax of those lines briefly discussed in chapter 9.5. A common feature of epic structure, in both its large and its small units, is what we call "ring-composition," or what ancient critics called "hysteron-proteron." In its most elaborate instance, we find Odysseus, at a crucial moment near the center of Homer's *Odyssey*, asking his mother's shade seven questions, to which she replies in exactly the reverse order, answering the last question first, the first last—and only when the first reappears as the last do we know we have reached the end.[16] Now see what Milton has done with this formal aspect of epic tradition. The two lines at 2.559–60 are constructed in exactly that way: the four terms of the first line reappear in reverse order in the following line. Well, not quite. The first term is missing, the devils add adjectives to complete the pentameter, and instead they find "no end, in wandring mazes lost." And the term to which the devils, in their reasoning, are not able to get back—the end they cannot reach—is Providence. The Miltonic paradox of freedom and God's absolute foreknowledge remains an intellectual conundrum: it cannot be resolved by the inward experience of freedom, for these devils are in Hell. The frustration of the devils' reasoning is mirrored by the frustration of the conventional epic syntax. To be in Hell is to be denied access to Providence, which is here represented as a looking forward to the end, and the freedom to find it. It is not just "hard and rare" (in Milton's variation of Vergil's *hoc opus, hic labor est*) to get back out of Hell: it is, for a devil, impossible. These lines, like the Mount Niphates speech, show what that might feel like.

It is worth recalling, to explain the personal feel of these words, that Milton had written in his early tract *Of Reformation*:

> I doe now feele my selfe in wrapt on the sodaine into those mazes and *Labyrinths* of dreadful and hideous thoughts, that which way to get out, or which way to end I know not, unlesse I turn mine eyes, and lift up my hands to that Eternall and Propitious *Throne*, where nothing is readier then *grace* and *refuge* to the distresses of mortall Suppliants. (YP 1.613)

[16] Homer, *Odyssey* 11.170–203; Samuel Bassett, *The Poetry of Homer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1938), pp. 120–24.

The antithesis in this eloquent prose is also built into the poem. Contrast in this respect the end of the poem, with its very different "wandring." Richard Bentley, the reader will recall from chapter 9, treated Milton's text as an extension of the corrupt manuscript tradition of Homer, on the grounds that Milton was blind and therefore could not correct his own proofs. Bentley, clearly, had little faith in voice or hearing. He was especially scandalized by the illogicality at the very end of the poem. The final words of the poem tell us that

> The World was all before them, where to choose
> Thir place of rest, and Providence thir guide:
> They hand in hand with wandring steps and slow,
> Though *Eden* took thir solitarie way.
>
> (PL 12.646–49)

Bentley was concerned by the rather downbeat, "sorrowful" stress on "solitarie," perhaps because Adam and Eve are hand in hand at the time. He rewrote the last two lines as follows.

> They hand in hand with social steps their way
> Through *Eden* took, with heavenly comfort Cheered.

But he was also worried by the contradiction he felt with the previous statement that they had "Providence / thir guide." How could they be both wandering and guided by Providence? "Very improper," he remarks severely.[17] If, however, we allow the received text to be essentially Milton's and not some incompetent copyist's, then we recognize the fundamental paradox of Miltonic Christianity here at the very end of the poem: Adam and Eve do indeed have Providence as their guide, yet they are free to choose their place of rest, choice being crucial in defining freedom for both Aristotle and Milton. Milton's syntax even implies that Providence itself may be the object of their choosing.

If we do not mess it about, like Bentley, then the theology of *Paradise Lost* is there in the poem's syntax and in its narrative structure, more than in its difficult and unpleasant God. It is an "indwelling presence"—but in more than a literary sense. Providence is excluded from Hell by the devils' adjectives—and so they "no end, in wandring mazes lost." But Adam and Eve become again present to each other in Book 10, and so the words of the Sentence take on a fresh presence: what dwelt in them is allowed to appear, and they can hear the promise. This renewed presence of Providence, for Adam and Eve, for the reader, guides the poem to its end and extends out of the poem into "the world" before them.

The stress, however, in spite of the often preachy presence of Gods, of

[17] Some of Bentley's emendations are quoted and discussed by William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, pp. 149–91, and by Frank Kermode in "Adam UnParadised," *The Living Milton*, pp. 101–3. See also chap. 9, n. 23, above, and John Shawcross, ed., *Milton* 1732–1801, pp. 41–62.

Raphaels, of Michaels, of narrators, is not, *pace* Bentley, on his "heavenly comfort," but on Adam and Eve, guided but "wandring" free, and together "solitarie." It is, finally, a matter of stress—but it behooves a reader, as it behooves a poet or singer, to get the stress right. In the regeneration scene of Book 10—in which the poem begins the movement towards its end, in which Adam, Eve, and reader learn again to hear and interpret the Word in the Sentence, but in which Satan, appearing ignominiously for the last time, remains trapped never to re-emerge in the poem—in that scene, the stress is not on the words of Christ's Sentence, but on when and how the words are heard.

Georgia Christopher's eloquent account of the regeneration scene—of "Adam's opening," as she calls it (following the Quakers)—also acknowledges that it is the real climax of the poem. My argument, like hers, is both literary and theological, but we differ in this crucial respect. I see a Milton who wants to dramatize the human experience of Grace as the chance to change, because he wants the reader to have the experience, too, before he pulls back the curtain and shows the deus ex machina at the beginning of Book 11. Adam and Eve go through a long process of transformation that includes the emotional and psychological preparation of despair, contrition, and reconciliation between man and wife. What Adam finally recalls may be the Promise as uttered by the voice of Christ, but what he actually hears at this moment of intense awareness is simply the voice of Eve. It is like, yet very unlike, the child's voice, perhaps a jump rope or counting-out rhyme, that Augustine heard beneath the fig tree, chanting "Tolle, lege; tolle, lege." What is important for Adam, too, is that the voice is outside himself, the voice of another, denied to that solitary voyeur, Satan.

We must not exaggerate the difference that these scenes make in the rest of the poem. It has taken Adam a while even to hear the words of the Promise, that first biblical version of the combat myth. It will now take two more books in which it is regularly reiterated before he can properly grasp its meaning. Indeed, the last revelation of all, as we shall see, is accompanied by a finely balanced expression of Adam's doubt, exactly the right reaction for a reader of this Satanically driven poem. The impact of Satan's success continues: the resulting world history is presented as a series of mostly tragic events aptly summarized in those resonant and typically alliterative words: "so shall the World goe on, / To good malignant, to bad men benigne" (12.537–38). Nonetheless, those phrases of apparent doom are not the end of the story. The underlying combat myth, which in its apocalyptic form looks forward to the time when "there shall be no more Satan,"[18] is immediately evoked in the next lines. The Savior is to appear in the clouds from Heaven "to dissolve / *Satan* with his perverted World" (12.546–47). New Earth and new Heaven will replace it,

[18] Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, p. 251, and chap. 1, n. 14, above.

corresponding in the outward world and in the end-time to the "Paradise within" that Michael explains to Adam will be "happier farr" than the earthly Paradise they are leaving in present time. That is the triumph to which the combat myth moves, whatever its particular form. Book 10 has given an instance of what that Paradise might be like and how mysteriously it is to be achieved.

The last word spoken by anyone in the poem is by Eve. She tells about her final dream, the one that has reconciled her to leaving Eden, and she tells Adam he is her Paradise:

> but now lead on;
> In mee is no delay; with thee to goe,
> Is to stay here; without thee here to stay,
> Is to go hence unwilling; thou to mee
> Art all things under Heav'n, all places thou.
>
> (PL 12.614–18)

And Adam's reaction? I hope this analysis of Book 10 will have helped us to respond more fully to what Milton tells us: "So spake our Mother *Eve*, and *Adam* heard / Well pleas'd, but answer'd not" (12.624–25). He has learned to hear.

ELEVEN

AT THE SIGN OF THE DOVE AND SERPENT

If ever man combined within himself all the mild qualities of the lamb with a considerable touch of the dove, and not a dash of the crocodile, or the least possible suggestion of the very mildest seasoning of the serpent, that man was he.

—DICKENS (Pecksniff, in *Martin Chuzzlewit*)

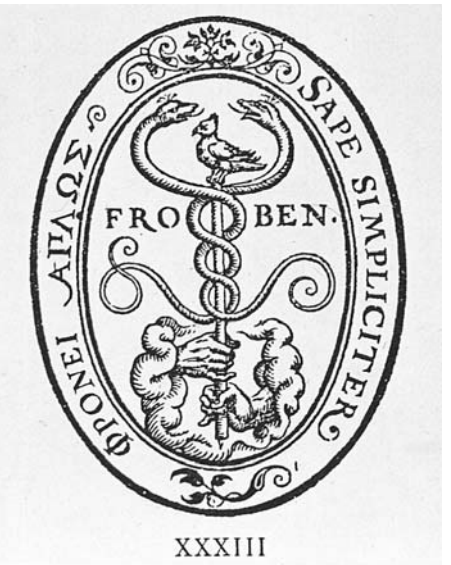

Figure 1. Printer's sign, Johannes Frobenius, Basel, 16th century

We have just been exploring the contrasting but related activity of the poem's two protagonists, Son and Satan, in Book 10. This opposition, which is essential to the combat myth Milton is retelling, is actually signalled very early in the poem and pervades it from then on. But so many things are happening in the first few lines of *Paradise Lost* that we are in danger of missing the wood for the trees. Thus we may miss the fact, obvious enough when we think about it, that the narration places two symbolic animals close to the beginning. First, as the conclusion to the invocation of the Muse, comes the

dove-like Spirit that inaugurates the many parallels between God's creation and Milton's poem (modesty in such matters not being Milton's strong suit). And then a few lines later comes the serpent, the answer to the first question posed to that inspiriting Muse: "say first what cause . . . " Both animals are fraught with symbolic implications that recur and accumulate throughout the poem. As in the emblem that heads this chapter, they carry opposed but related meanings.

The dove links with "the surer messenger," as Milton calls it (11.856), which announces with an olive branch the reappearance of dry land following the Bible's second Creation myth (the Flood), from Genesis 8, and also with the "perfect Dove" (PR 1.83) that descends at the Jordan baptism to represent God's identification of Christ as his son: "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased."[1] Indeed, the typological connecting of these two doves was a feature of early Christian Bible commentary, and Milton thus enters and evokes this ancient tradition.

But this Miltonic dove is neither of these. Not satisfied with merely reminding us of those biblical doves, Milton adds to and complicates them. For this dove, unlike his biblical prototypes, is androgynous, a widespread idea in the Hermetic and alchemical traditions, but rare among Protestants.[2] It broods on its young but it also impregnates, functions that are normally—or at least in nature among the higher animals—distributed between the two sexes separately. Obviously this is not a natural dove. It is above and beyond the natural world, both temporally, in that it precedes Creation, and symbolically, in that it transcends the normal process of reproduction within this vale of making.

The serpent, too, is by no means natural. Not only is he "the infernal serpent" when we first meet him, but gradually fabulous sets of implications are added unto him. He is quickly identified as Satan, and that figure in turn is eventually represented as an angel. Thus not only is he immediately seen to be beyond nature but, like the dove, he precedes it both temporally and symbolically. And he quickly becomes, we know, an immensely complex character, only taking on serpent skin again for the temptation scene. He then has it

[1] Matthew 3.16–17, Mark 1.10, Luke 3.22, and John 1.32–33 all record that the Holy Spirit descended at the baptism in the form of a dove. The dove is identified in Milton's *De doctrina Christiana* with "the actual person of the Holy Spirit, or its symbol" (YP 6.285), and this in spite of Milton's anti-Trinitarian contention a few pages later at 6.295 that the Holy Spirit is never invoked in the Bible. See also Piero della Francesca's depiction of *The Baptism* (1442), and El Greco's *Baptism* (1608), as suggested ad loc by Thomas Luxon, ed., *Paradise Regained*, in The Milton Reading Room, http://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton, September 1999.

[2] See Virginia Mollenkott, "Some Implications of Milton's Androgynous Muse," *Bucknell Review* 24 (1978): 27–36, O. B. Hardison, Jr. "In Medias Res in *Paradise Lost*," *Milton Studies 17*, ed. James D. Simmonds (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983), pp. 27–41, and William B. Hunter, Jr., and Stevie Davies, "Milton's Urania: the Meaning, Not the Name I Call," in *The Descent of Urania* (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 1989), pp. 31–45.

thrust upon him and his followers at the punishment in Book 10, and so, completing the circle, becomes that infernal serpent who opens the poem.

1. *Irenaeus*

At one level this opposition of dove and serpent with which the poem opens is simple enough to understand. The spirit moves in the world above, the infernal serpent below. The contrast between these two symbolic animals (even if "creatures" is not the right word for them) had been clearly felt and articulated early on in the Christian tradition. Milton had read Irenaeus,[3] and he makes a straightforward contrast between the two. Indeed, it may be this symbolic contrast that underlies Milton's decision to begin his poem with precisely this pair. Satan as serpent may have been forced upon him, given his obvious need to follow the Vergilian model of question for the Muse about causes, but there was no particular reason why the narrative or theological traditions required the poem to open with this pair. The broody dove at least is a gratuitous addition, and involved following (as Leonard points out) the Tremellius-Junius Bible reading *incubabat* for Genesis 1.2 rather than the AV, where the spirit "moved" on the face of the waters.

Here is what Irenaeus says. He is talking about the redemptive and typological implications of Christ's sacrifice.

> Then was the sin of the first-formed man healed by the virtue of the First-Begotten, the wisdom of the serpent was conquered by the simplicity of the dove, and the chains were broken by which we were in bondage to death.[4]

The relationship of dove and serpent is articulated in the terms that control the basic Christian narrative, the combat myth, as it was elaborated by the early Fathers of the Church. Among other things, this means that what came to be called the *protevangelion*, the verse at Genesis 3.15 about enmity between seed of woman and serpent, has already been reinterpreted in a long-term, indeed cosmic, perspective: it was seen to prophesy the coming of Christ (confirmed by the dove) and the ultimate overthrow of Satan (not mentioned in Genesis). It was taken to be the first cryptic announcement in the Old Testament of the Christian gospel revealed in the New. The serpent eventually yields to the dove.

[3] Janel Mueller, "Milton on Heresy," pp. 21–38; RM, p. 1007.

[4] Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, ed. Adelin Rousseau and Louis Doutreleau. 5 vols. Sources Chrétiennes (Paris: Cerf, 1965–82), 5.19.1, Vol. 5/2: 250. For the translation, see 5/1: 304–5; cf. Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, pp. 345–47. On Irenaeus and the combat myth, see especially Gustav Aulèn, *Christus Victor* (New York: Macmillan, [1931] 1969), pp. 16–35: he shows that the early theory of the atonement as conclusion of the combat myth, as a ransom paid to the Devil, was what Luther took up, not what he calls the Latin and rationalizing theory, promulgated by Anselm, in which the ransom was paid to God. The Lutheran theory would have been Milton's, as well.

The new idea picked up several other *logia* (sayings) of Christ, including the ones at Luke 10.19, a crucial group for the identification of Satan: "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. See, I have given you the ability (*exousian*) to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy (*tou echthrou*)." Irenaeus was developing his theory of recapitulation, in which the gospel events are seen to pick up and reverse the events of Genesis 2–3 (Adam/Christ, Tree/Cross, Eve/Mary). Thus he takes Jesus to be referring to the Eden story when he promises power over serpents: indeed, Irenaeus's Latin translator uses the same word for both his Old and New Testament texts, *calcare*, to heed upon. And Irenaeus had good reason to link serpents and Satan, since Christ's words in Luke 10.19 bring Satan and serpent into the same framework of the enemy, and that textual link was vital in building the general Christian picture of the Devil. Indeed, the combat-myth reading of Scripture and Christ's words was almost certainly present already in (the author of) Luke's mind, since Christ's words are a response to the seventy apostles returning "with joy" from their mission and saying "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in thy name." Exorcisms, Eden, and the Old Enemy are all part of the same story—or are all being understood together.

2. *The Wisdom of the Serpent*

So the opposition of dove and serpent in Irenaeus's perspective is ambitious and all-inclusive. It takes in most of cosmic history in so far as that history is understood as the stage for a combat of hero and villain in the Christian myth, and that is the basic narrative of the New Testament. But the opposition of dove and serpent, useful as it clearly was for Milton's plot, is not the only perspective in which the foundational texts imagine these two symbolic animals. The early Church tended to, needed to, oversimplify the story it was telling itself and its converts, but Milton was quite capable of seeing the complexity beneath the simplicity of the myth. In particular, once we check Irenaeus's version against the words that appear in the New Testament, we can see how much he simplified. For in Matthew 10.16, Christ says to the disciples, "Behold I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be ye wise as serpents and innocent as doves."[5] Ignatius, *Polycarp* 2.2, seems to quote this saying, but generalized, no longer part of the disciples' mission (no wolves): "Be wise as the serpent in all things and innocent always as the dove." It is possible that Irenaeus knew these words as an independent *logion* from the oral tradition (he revered his boyhood memories of Polycarp, and was probably a student of Justin Martyr). But in view of the similarity to the Matthew *logion*, commentators think Irenaeus has merely distorted the saying of Jesus in the

[5] The Greek has *phronimoi* (French *rusé*), the same word as in Genesis 2 for the cunning serpent, and *akeraioi* (unmixed) for the innocent doves, Latin *simplices*.

direction of his burgeoning myth. "The wisdom of the serpent" has now been "conquered by the simplicity of the dove."

The saying may go back even earlier in the textual transmission, even to Paul himself, whose letters are the earliest Christian documents. There are no animals here, it is true, but Paul writes to the Romans (16.19) that "I would have you be wise as to the good, guileless (*akeraious*) as to evil." In both Matthew and Romans the context is a warning about the opposition to be expected by the faithful. And Paul's next words reiterate the promise that "God will soon crush Satan under your feet," in which commentators see another allusion to the prophecy of Genesis 3.15 about the crushing of the serpent's head under foot.[6] If so, then Satanic enmity, Genesis serpent, and unpleasant treatment of the new Christian communities, are all being linked.

The words of Paul may imply turning the enemy's weapon, guile, against him. Nonetheless Paul makes no explicit reference here to a serpent, in relation to Genesis or otherwise. Rather the allusion seems to be to the enemies in Psalm 110.1, where the victor is told to "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool." And it is not obvious why Paul "clarifies" the saying by adding that the faithful should be wise as to the good, and guileless as to evil. At any rate, we can surely see that the implications of doves and serpents, and the innocence and wisdom for which they stand (once we follow them back to the foundational texts) are by no means easy to understand. No doubt many an enterprising clergyman has preached on the problems they pose. In Paul's words to the Romans, or in Christ's words in Matthew, we can certainly find the rhetorical figure of antithesis, even the logical device of paradox, but not what we saw in Irenaeus, the metaphysical or transcendent combat. It is probable, in fact, that the opposition is proverbial, since there is a Midrash of Canticles 2.14 that says: "God saith of the Israelites: Towards me they are as sincere as doves, but towards the Gentiles they are as serpents."[7] Apparently the Christian version deliberately adapts the proverb. So it looks as if the proverb could break in two directions, towards antithesis, but in regard of the same object, or towards opposition. In any case, in all the biblical citations—but not in Irenaeus—it proves to be a good thing to behave like a snake.

3. *Image*

Renaissance images sometimes reproduce the dove-serpent relation. The best known is probably the sign of Johannes Frobenius, the Basel printer of Eras-

[6] See Bruce Vawter, "'And He Shall Come Again with Glory': Paul and Christian Apocalypse," in *Studiorum Paulinorum Congress 1961* (Rome: Pontifical Institute, 1963), pp. 143–50; idem, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), pp. 39–45; Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (London: SCM Press, 1980), p. 418.

[7] See W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1991), 2:180–81. The verses at Canticles 2.14–15 oppose the dove to the little foxes who spoil the vine.

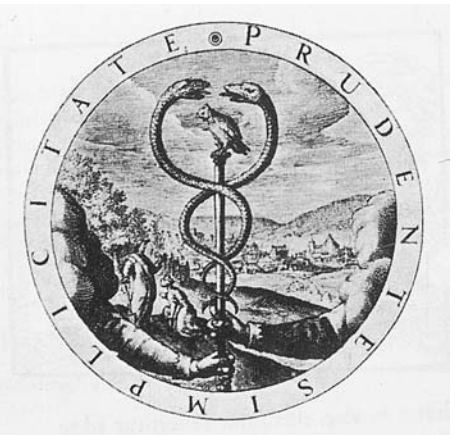

Figure 2. Prudente Simplicitate. Gabriel Rollenhagen, *Emblamata*, 1618

mus's early works, which is reproduced at the beginning of this chapter (Fig. 1).[8] The motto that goes with it is often "Prudens simplicitas, amorque recti." Thus to the combined animal symbols, the motto adds the rectitude of the staff that supports them. A similar image, with two intertwined but aggressive snakes climbing a staff, on the top of which sits a dove, is repeated in the later (1618) collection of emblems of Gabriel Rollenhagen (Fig. 2).[9]

And there are interesting variations: in an engraving by Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617),[10] a woman sits allegorically holding two snakes in one hand, two doves on her lap (Fig. 3), while in another, this time from a sacred emblem book,[11] the cross itself is being climbed by a serpent, while the dove sits atop

[8] Paul Heitz, *Basler Büchermarken* (Strassburg: Heitz & Mündel, 1895), pp. xx–xliii, figs. 23–61; Ludwig Volkmann, *Bilderschriften der Renaissance* (Stuttgart: Hierseman, 1923), p. 73. In some versions of the sign, the resemblance to a caduceus is more pronounced, linking the image both with Hermes and with the medical profession. Curiously enough, Irenaeus's book was first published by Erasmus in 1526, and indeed printed by that same Johannes Frobenius of Basel.

[9] Arthur Henkel and Albrecht Schöne, eds., *Emblemata: Handbuch zür Sinnbildkunst des XVI. und XVII Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1978), p. 649.

[10] F.W.H. Hollstein, *Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts* 53 vols. (Amsterdam: Hertzberger, 1949–60), Vol. 8, p. 22

[11] Daniel Cramer, *Emblemata Sacra* (Hildesheim: Olms, [1624] 1994), p. 153, repeated in George Wither's *Collection of Emblems, Ancient and Modern* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, [1635] 1975), p. 151. Wither's verses, which clearly capture the ambiguity of the serpent, begin:

> With which, there is no Dove like meekenesse joyn'd,
> When from the harmelesse Turtle, and the Snake,
> Their most commended properties wee take,
> (And, mixe them well) they make a composition,
> Which yeelds a temper of the best condition.
> Yet, wickednesse, or sorrow, doeth abound,

Figure 3. An engraving by Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617). The woman holds two doves in her right hand. The Latin means "The worshippers of Christ are enjoined to imitate serpents in cunning and doves in simplicity. They have no fear whether they stand in the presence of Justice, and their strength increases when they follow these signs in life."

Figure 4. Sapientia Simplex. Daniel Cramer, *Emblemata Sacra*, 1624

Where any one of these, alone is found:
For, whensoe're the Serpents braine we find,
With which, there is no Dove like meekenesse joyn'd,
(Without all peradventure) thence proceedes,
All harmefull fraud, and all injurious deedes.

looking anxiously down (Fig. 4). In each case the reference is clearly Matthew 10.16, which is usually quoted on the same page, but the ambiguity of the serpent image is hard to ignore. In fact, Erasmus himself, discussing his publisher's emblem, contrasts its success unfavorably with that of the dolphin image of the Aldine press, and recommends to him, as well as the rectitude of the staff in which he takes such pride, a bit more of the serpent's commercial cunning.[12]

4. *The Brazen Serpent*

The most common representation of a serpent in Renaissance art is not the serpent of Eden, but rather the "brazen serpent" that Moses fashions and "lifts up" in the wilderness (Numbers 21.4–9), although there was some overlap between the two.[13] The story goes that as they wandered in the desert, the Israelites railed against Moses and God who therefore "sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died." Recognizing their sin, the people begged Moses to pray for relief: "And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live." So Moses made a serpent of brass, and it had the predicted effect. In the early modern period, this subject was used as a typological reference to Christ on the cross, who had himself declared, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3.14–15). In a fifteenth-century woodcut, the brazen serpent flanks the Crucifixion, while a sixteenth-century German gold thaler has the Crucifixion on one side and the serpent entwined about a tree/cross on the other. Michelangelo's fresco in the Sistine Chapel influenced Maerten van Heemskerck's 1549 painting of the subject (to be seen in the Princeton Museum). There are versions by Cranach, in paintings called *The Allegory of Law and Grace* (1529–39), and by Van Dyck (1620), as well as the well-known Rubens in London's National Gallery (probably late 1630s).

Both sides of the Reformation controversy made use of the brazen serpent story. Catholics saw it as proof of the legitimacy of image making, and Pope Leo X compared Lutherans to fiery serpents poisoning Christians with their doctrines. Luther, however, used it as a metaphor for justification by faith, distinguishing symbolic revelation from idolatry. By choosing an image of the same object that afflicted the people, God shows that the object itself could not possibly be the source of the healing power: only faith in God's word will heal. "Genesis, therefore, is made up almost entirely of illustrations of faith and

[12] Erasmus, *Typographicus lectori: Adagiorum chiliades* (Basel: Joh. Frobenius, 1536), p. 361.

[13] See Helène E. Roberts, ed., *Encyclopedia of Comparative Iconography* (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1998), pp. 815–16.

unbelief, and the fruits that faith and unbelief bear. It is an exceedingly evangelical book" (25.237). In his commentary on Genesis 3.23–24 (1.170), Luther discusses the tree of life and the brazen serpent, and expands in the "Excursus on Allegory" (1.368), as well as in his commentary on John (22.205).[14] The ambivalence of the serpent, in these controversies both poisoner and sign of faith, could not be more clearly demonstrated.

5. *The Meaning of History*

What are we to make of these complex reverberations of the Biblical texts for a reading of *Paradise Lost*? On the one hand, we find that the basic structure of the poem is embodied in the Irenaean opposition of symbolic animals at the beginning: eventually the serpent is to yield to the dove, God's representative, the victor in the cosmic struggle. On the other hand, that opposition is undermined by the words of Christ, frequently illustrated as we have just seen, likening himself to a serpent and recommending that his followers imitate not only doves but snakes. We have a typically paradoxical situation in which two different readings, two competing discourses, seem to clamor for our attention at the same time.

For the serpent in *Paradise Lost*, the situation is desperate. Despite his cunning and Christ's recommendation, he cannot remain innocent once he becomes the bodysuit for Satan. He is condemned, but mysteriously, and Satan tells us so. So does the narrator, in case we doubt the word of the fiend: at 10.168–69, he is "justly then accurst, / As vitiated in Nature." There follows immediately the prophecy about bruises and crushed heads (10.175–92). This contamination of the serpent and the resulting curse posed an insoluble problem for theologians, as Flannagan's (RM, nn. 67–68, p. 629) notes on the passage explain.[15]

Once we take the subtext seriously, however, another, more interesting possibility emerges, that the combat myth on which Christianity and the poem is constructed is not the final truth, as it were—though we may need the wisdom of the serpent to see it. Instead of eternal warfare, Christianity offers another possibility, that of reconciliation and redemption, even of the serpent. Origen, it is true, was condemned as a heretic for his belief that the Devil himself might be saved. And clearly *Paradise Lost* holds out that enticing prospect only to have it rejected through the magnificent soliloquy on Mount Niphates. Satan imagines repentance ("O then at last relent: is there no place / Left for Repentance, none for Pardon left?"; 4.79–80), but then rejects it himself because of "Disdain" and his "dread of shame" (4.82). But perhaps the

[14] Georgia Christopher, *Science*, p. 137. Milton compared the citing of authorities rather than thinking for oneself to Moses' brazen serpent in *Of Reformation* (YP 1.535); see Edwards, *Milton and the Natural World*, p. 95.

[15] See chap. 9.4, above.

poem itself redeems Satan and serpent through a process similar to the one Blake divined in the true poet, except that, being in this sense of the Devil's party, everyone comes to know it, as Milton obviously did. The source of energy in the poem is Satan; it is he who drives the poem into motion and whose plot provides the motor of the action. With every reading we revive and reactivate that energy. But the energy is not random or indiscriminate, even in its moments of most intense hatred. It is always held within a structure that ultimately leads towards understanding and so redemption.

The obvious instance is in Adam's savage denunciation of Eve, "Out of my sight, thou Serpent . . . " (10.867), which he utters, it seems, while still "On the Ground / Outstrecht he lay, on the cold ground, and oft / Curs'd his Creation" (10.850–52); that is in the same posture in which we first find the infernal serpent (one of several reminiscences of Satan in Adam's speeches in Book 10, as we saw in the previous chapter). This leads to the recovered memory of what is known as "the Promise," which Adam and Eve have heard but not understood until their emotional condition is right to receive it. And that promise, of course is the fuzzy language about the serpent's head.

> thy Seed shall bruise
> The Serpents head; piteous amends, unless
> Be meant, whom I conjecture, our grand Foe
> *Satan*, who in the Serpent hath contriv'd
> Against us this deceit: to crush his head
> Would be revenge indeed.
>
> (PL 10.1031–36)

Adam's excitement quickly increases the punishment from a bruised to a crushed head, once his conjecture adds Satan to the serpent (both words occur in the sources, but not so arranged). Revenge is not exactly the point, of course. It takes Adam another two Books to understand it, and then at first Adam gets it wrong: he recalls the Promise at 12.383–84, "Needs must the Serpent now his capital bruise / Expect with mortal paine." But he does finally grasp the distinction between the eventual defeat of Satan and of "his works / In thee and in thy Seed" (12.394–95). In effect he recovers the wisdom he was deprived of at the Fall, which is to distinguish clearly in theological and metaphorical ways the symbolic meanings of a saying from the literal, the Paradise within from the earthly garden, and the inner from the infernal serpent.

Similarly, the deeper meaning of the poem lies not in the combat that informs it, but in the subsumption of serpent within dove that begins it. For if we return to that initial passage now, we will note what few have realized,[16] that the words "Th' infernal Serpent; he it was . . . " (1.34) are spoken not by

[16] But see Kerrigan, *Prophetic*, p. 141.

the narrator, but by the dove-like spirit. They are the Muse-spirit's answer to the poet-narrator's question: "Say first what cause. . . " So the first words of the dove are to identify the serpent. Follow that logic and you find that the whole poem, as indeed the classical convention of the inspiring Muse requires, is the work of the dove-like spirit. And that same spirit is also the answer to Adam's final question to the angel: "who then shall guide / His people, who defend?", to which Michael replies: "from Heav'n / Hee to his own a Comforter will send" (12.482–86). This inner Comforter, the Paraklete, had long been understood as a variant of the dove-like Spirit.[17] The operations of that Spirit, rather than the combat represented by the language of conquest and bruise, are the climax of the sequence of revelations made to Adam about the meaning of the history he is living in and initiating.

6. *Christ and Serpent*

Did Milton know that according to a Gnostic tradition, Christ, not Satan, was the serpent of Genesis, the bringer of Gnosis or spiritual knowledge? Augustine explains this Ophite belief clearly enough in his *De haeresibus*.[18] In the recently unearthed *Testimony of Truth*, Christ comes to release Adam and Eve from "the error of the angels"; that is, the malevolent rulers who pretend to be God in this world. Milton may have known the Augustine passage, but it is also possible he simply exploits the ambiguities of the traditional equations. The Gnostics were, in many ways, the most sophisticated readers of Scripture in the ancient world, steadily finding the hidden meaning beneath the surface text, and Milton was certainly capable of taking the same route to his beliefs. Christ as the "general serpent" (one form of the Gnostic belief) could be reinforced by his own words about being lifted up like the serpent, as well as his recommendation to be wise as serpents. Indeed that is probably why Irenaeus, writing to combat the rival Gnostic readings of Scripture, gave his own version of the gospel-saying, carefully separating the serpent from the dove in his typological scheme: "Then was the sin of the first-formed man healed by the virtue of the First-Begotten (Christ), the wisdom of the serpent

[17] John 15.26. The subtitle of Charles Williams's classic *The Descent of the Dove* is "A History of the Holy Spirit in the Church" (New York: Meridian, [1939], 1956).

[18] Augustine, *De Haeresibus* 17, in *Corpus Christianorum*, Vol. 46, p. 297: "Ophitae a colubro nominati sunt: coluber enim Graece ophis dicitur. Hunc autem Christum arbitrantur." Epiphanius, *Panarion* 38 (Book 1, sections 1–4), also says the Ophites exalted the serpent by identifying him with Christ. Compare the Nag Hammadi version in *Testimony of Truth* 45.23–49.9 in James T. Robinson, ed., *Nag Hammadi Library*, pp. 411–12; and Michael Stone, *Jewish Writings*, p. 457, which links all those serpents together. See Elaine Pagels, *Origin*, pp. 159–60. Hans Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, p. 93, says that "more than one Gnostic sect derived its name from the cult of the serpent ('Ophites' from the Gk. *ophis*; 'Naasenes' from the Heb. *nahas*—the group as a whole being termed 'ophitic')." Irenaeus, 1.30.7, says that, once Adam and Eve had eaten, "they knew the power from beyond and turned away from their creators" (i.e., the Demiurge, Ialdabaoth).

was conquered by the simplicity of the dove, and the chains were broken by which we were in bondage to death." Thus did the struggle with rival interpretations produce the sharp oppositions and simplifications of orthodoxy.

Perhaps we can see how the paradoxical wisdom of the serpent works in *Paradise Lost* if we recast the Satan-serpent–figure not only as the embodiment of the old enemy but as the Judeo-Christian version of that fundamental figure of the world's mythologies, the trickster, he who teaches (often inadvertently) the basic truths about the universe even as he tries (or seems) himself to subvert those truths.[19] That may be what the reconciliation of dove and serpent is supposed to mean in those enigmatic words of Christ in Matthew 10.16. That is the personal drama that Milton fully explored when he turned Satan into the trickster-teacher of Christ in *Paradise Regain'd*. Thus the Satan of the myth may well be damned for his unrelenting hostility to God, but the Satan of the poems is redeemed by his benign but unconscious relation to the reader. At the climax of his tempting-teaching of the Son, Satan joins him on the temple pinnacle and momentarily substitutes for him as the angels come to rescue him from his fall. Or so generations of readers must have thought as they read those words near the end:

> So Satan fell and strait a fiery Globe
> Of Angels on full sail of wing flew nigh,
> Who on their plumy Vans receiv'd him soft.
>
> (PR 4.581–83)

We have to go back at that point to realize that Christ rather than Satan must be the referent of the pronoun, as the rest of the narrative continues to describe how these angels "in a flowry valley set him down / On a green bank" (4.586–87) and serve him a meal of "Celestial Food, Divine" (4.588). Briefly the pronoun "him," like the pinnacle, is inhabited by both Satan and Christ.[20]

The key moment in the kind of narrative we call romance comes when the hero unhelmets his enemy and discovers himself. As Fredric Jameson describes it, "Romance in its original strong form may be understood as an imaginary

[19] The classic anthropological studies are Paul Radin, *The Trickster: a Study in American Indian Mythology* (New York: Schocken, [1956] 1972), and Robert D. Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa: A Study of Mythic Irony and Sacred Delight* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980). See also Wayne Rebhorn, "'The Emperour of Mens Minds'": The Renaissance Trickster as *Homo Rhetoricus*," in *Creative Imitation*, ed. David Quint et al. (Binghamton: MRTS, 1992), pp. 31–65. The link with Prometheus and Asa'el as "culture heroes",—tricksters of the high-god for the benefit of mankind—is not stressed in any of these studies. Rebhorn does see a parallel with Satan, but solely in terms of power (42).

[20] Kerrigan, *Sacred Complex*, p. 90. For the similar confusion, this time of Father and Son at PL 7.587–92, where the text itself is corrupt, see the exchange between Michael Bauman and Gordon Campbell in *MLR* 75 (1980): 507–14, and *Milton Quarterly* 19 (1985); 110–12 and 23 (1989): 104–8. Campbell appeals (105) to Dr. Archie Burnett, expert on Milton's syntax, who says that "'he' can refer back to 'filial power' or to 'his great Father'; there is no reason why one must take it to refer unambiguously to the nearer of the two antecedents. . . . Grammatically it remains ambiguous. Let the theologians dispute it!"

'solution' to the perplexing question of how my enemy can be thought of as being *alien* (that is, as other than myself and marked by some absolute difference)," when in fact he shares the hero's own ideals of conduct—points of honor, challenges, tests of strength—and reflects him as in a mirror.[21] Not only romance, I would add, but epic, too—at least in its Homeric form before Vergil made it go nationalist,[22] and certainly these mythic Miltonic epics—approaches this state of suspension between its deep and surface structures. Christ's enigmatic response to Satan's final challenge, "Tempt not the Lord thy God" (4.561), makes Satan fall, smitten with amazement. The difference between the two seems finally clear, and yet just at this moment the two become one—in a pronoun. Just for a moment, the dark secret was out, that hero and enemy are one and the same, good and bad father, good and bad son.

Far from dismissing Satan, as John Carey's note suggests, so that "he ceases to count even as a grammatical referent," the effect of the momentary confusion is to replace Christ with Satan, and in the inevitable correction of this reading, to reverse the substitution. Satan's role has been inadvertently to bring Christ to be himself, and it is a delicate irony that at the climactic moment, he should also be the ultimate other. Once again, the text of the poem, if not the doctrine, has redeemed Satan. And it is almost certainly no accident that, if the dove is the one to identify the infernal serpent in *Paradise Lost*, the reverse happens in *Paradise Regain'd*. The phrase "A perfect Dove" quoted earlier is actually part of Satan's opening description of the baptism in the Jordan:

> I saw
> The Prophet do him reverence, on him rising
> Out of the water, Heav'n above the Clouds
> Unfold her Crystal Dores, thence on his head
> A perfect Dove descend, what e're it meant,
> And out of Heav'n the Sov'raign voice I heard
> This is my Son belov'd, in him am pleas'd.
>
> (PR 1.79–85)

In view of the complexity we have uncovered in the identification of this pair of symbols, it is surely appropriate that Satan should say he doesn't understand it.

[21] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp. 118–19. Compare the comment of Luther Link, *The Devil*, p. 40, on the Venetian painter Lorenzo Lotto's *Michael and Lucifer*: "To represent a horde of falling *monsters* attacked by angels (as Breughel did) is one thing. To represent *angels* attacked by *angels* is quite something else. The awkward problem, usually avoided, is confronted in Lotto's painting. Michael and Lucifer are the same: the same body, the same face. They are twins, complementary souls. The other face of Michael is Lucifer."

[22] David Quint, *Epic and Empire*, argues that Vergil transformed his models by virtually inventing the nationalist and imperialist epic. Homer's heroes, on the other hand, manifestly belong to the same culture and share the same social and political values.

TWELVE

"FULL OF DOUBT I STAND": THE STRUCTURES OF *Paradise Lost*

> Man knows the beginning of sin, but who bounds the issue thereof?
>
> —BUNYAN

Paradise Lost was published in two different editions during Milton's life. The first edition of 1667 appeared in ten books, the second of 1674 in twelve. Apart from some fifteen new lines, there were no other important changes between the two editions, yet the alteration of its external form shifts the way in which one perceives the poem's informing structure, what Aristotle called the *mythos*. The longest books of the first edition were the last four. These were divided into six for *1674*. Most of the extra lines also occur in the second half of the poem, changes that had the effect of moving the formal center of the poem when judged by line-counting. This fact has troubled the numerologists, whose spectacular successes with other Renaissance poets have not been repeated in Milton's case.[1] By counting the lines of *Paradise Lost* as part of more ambitious numerological enterprises, Gunnar Qvarnström and Alastair Fowler found that the exact middle of the poem fell between lines 761 and 762 of Book 6. There the Son

> in Celestial Panoplie all armd
> Of radiant *Urim*, work divinely wrought,
> Ascended, at his right hand Victorie
> Sate Eagle-wing'd, beside him hung his Bow.
>
> (PL 6.760–63)[2]

[1] See especially A. Kent Hieatt, *Short Time's Endless Monument: The Symbolism of Numbers in Edmund Spenser's Epithalamion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960); see also Maren-Sofie Røstvig, "Ars Aeterna: Renaissance Poetics and Theories of Divine Creation," *Mosaic* 3 (1970): 40–61; idem, *Configurations: A Topomorphical Approach to Renaissance Poetry* (Oslo: Oslo University Press, 1994); Alastair Fowler, ed., *Silent Poetry: Essays in Numerological Analysis* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970); idem, *Triumphal Forms: Structural Patterns in Elizabethan Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

[2] For Fowler's discussion of the numerological center, see his editions of 1971, pp. 22–28, 1998, pp. 25–29, and ad loc 6.749 and 761; he follows Gunnar Qvarnström, *Poetry and Numbers* (Lund: Gleerup, 1966), p. 93, and idem, *The Enchanted Palace: Some Structural Aspects of Paradise Lost* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1967); Christopher Butler, *Number Symbolism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), pp. 140–58. Maren-Sophie Røstvig's argument for the superiority of 1667, *Configurations*, chap. 9, is also cited with respect by Thomas Corns, *Regaining*, pp. 119–20;

That is, the hero of the cosmic battle climbs up into his chariot wearing the mysterious *Urim*, the stone on Aaron's breastplate of judgment that had taken on alchemical overtones. The action is seen to have various symbolic implications, including an anticipation of the event commemorated in the liturgical year by Ascension Day.

Now a poet as conscious of structural organization as Milton may well have intended this minor felicity, but if so he seems to have abandoned or deconstructed it himself. It is the first edition only in which this figural ascension is exactly placed at the center: in *1674*, the one we all read, the new center, as Fowler was honest enough to admit, comes four-and-a-half lines later. Fowler did not, however, feel obliged to quote the new line at the middle, which announces that "from about" the Son rolled a fierce effusion "Of smoak and bickering flame, and sparkles dire" (6.766). That is, in words that adapt Psalm 18, the Son is so angry that he gives off smoke and flames. The question now poses itself: what led Milton so to decenter his own poem that the exact middle became "bickering flame" rather than the neat and satisfying moment of the archetypal Ascension?

No critic who has paid attention to the problem offers a positive reason. W. B. Hunter, Jr., indeed, decided it was the printer's fault. The lines of the first edition had been misnumbered, so Milton was unaware that, in adding lines for *1674*, he shifted the numerical center. This may be true, but the argument smacks of the notorious insistence of Bentley that the blind Milton was at the mercy of an incompetent friend who saw the book through the press.[3] What is more, Hunter's suggestion unfortunately implies that Milton did not pay as much attention to line-counting as this particular kind of formalism would require, or perhaps that the structure of the poem, conceived in this way, is, like its main characters, finally in the hands of Providence.

No doubt other considerations than line-counting were at work in the restructuring of the second edition. A persuasive approach to this question has been that of Arthur Barker.[4] He argued that the ten-book structure still suggested too much of Milton's original intention, recorded in the Trinity manuscript, to write a five-act tragedy, whereas the twelve-book structure, echoing Vergil, subsumed the tragedy within the larger encyclopedic possibilities of epic. The new shape was achieved very simply, by dividing the two longest

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cf. John T. Shawcross, *With Mortal Voice: The Creation of* Paradise Lost (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1982).

[3] William B. Hunter, Jr., "The Center of Paradise Lost," *English Language Notes* 7 (1969): 32–34. For Bentley, see chap. 9, p. 275, above. In his second edition (1998, p. 27), Fowler says that the extra 15 lines correspond to the cabbalistic gematria for the divine name, as does the new line count.

[4] Arthur E. Barker, "Structural Pattern in Paradise Lost," *Philological Quarterly* 28 (1949): 17–30, reprinted in *Milton: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 142–55.

books of *1667* into what are now Books 7 and 8, and 11 and 12. But the result was spectacular. The ten-book structure of *1667* (what Barker saw as making up five two-book acts) was broken and converted by various new designs discernible in the numerical possibilities (e.g., 6 × 2 and 3 × 4) of the *1664*. The later version makes clear what was only implicit in *1667*; that conversion, regeneration, and the bringing of good from evil are structural, as well as doctrinal, principles of *Paradise Lost*. The reorganization of the second edition is Milton's final illustration of this principle—and final effort at shackling Satan.

Not only was Milton aware, as the preface to *Samson Agonistes* makes clear, of the basic Aristotelian dictum that a poet is more the maker of plots than of meters, but in writing the first version of *Paradise Lost* he had perhaps followed too closely the Renaissance understanding of Aristotle. Although the *Poetics* contains many remarks about epic poetry, its focus on tragic form had led to a fashion for ten-book epics according to what were thought to be Aristotelian precepts. The crisis, the major turn of events, for example, should come in the equivalent of the fourth act. What we read as Book 9 of *Paradise Lost* was originally Book 8, and thus the Fall of Man had its obvious and rightful place as the tragic *peripeteia*.[5] Each of the first three acts moves toward anticipations of this crisis: in Book 2, Satan conceives the plan to subvert mankind and begins his journey to the new world; in Book 4, he makes a preliminary attempt and the Book ends with a face-off between Gabriel and Satan, the scales dangling enigmatically in God's sky; the third act, Books 5 and 6, contains the Rebellion and War, dramatic image of divine discord, and although it ends with Satan's defeat, we know this to be the immediate occasion for the revenge he is planning. By the end of the fourth act he has succeeded and can retire from the scene. Act Five, all of what is now the last three books, presented the consequences of his success: as a well-known passage near the end of the poem puts it, "so shall the World goe on, / To good malignant, to bad men benigne, / Under her own waight groaning" (12.537–39). Satan and his plot thus dominated the first edition in a way that confirmed the Romantic view of the poem's hero.

This *Paradise Lost*, we may add, had something like the structure, not simply of tragedy *tout court*, but of that peculiar Renaissance type that we have learned to call "revenge tragedy." Satan's real model, thus, would not be the Iago proposed by C. S. Lewis, or the Faustus suggested in an influential essay by Helen Gardner,[6] nor even, though they come closer, Macbeth, Beatrice-

[5] Lucan's *Pharsalia* is in 10 books, as is Camões' *Os Lusiades*; Tasso's *Gensalemma Liberata* is in 20. See Barker, "Structural," p. 148, and especially the authoritative discussion by John M. Steadman, *Epic and Tragic Structure in Paradise Lost* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 29–59; see also J. Patrick Tyson, "The Satan Tragedy in 'Paradise Lost'," in Griffith and Zimmerman, *Papers on Milton*, pp. 47–56.

[6] C. S. Lewis, *Preface*, p. 98; Helen Gardner, "Milton's Satan and the Theme of Damnation in

Joanna in *The Changeling*, or Ferdinand in *The Duchess of Malfi*, but Hamlet. The sympathy we are invited to feel for each has a similar occasion—their magnificent and tormented soliloquies; and in each case they are eventual victims of parallel revenge plots against themselves, but worked out in secret and so without their knowledge. In Hamlet's case, the patent villainy of Claudius's counterplot intensifies our fearful sympathy with the hero, while Shelley, Empson, and other accomplished readers have testified that they have similar reactions to Milton's Satan and his villainous God. We may add that Satan uses or is linked with the word "revenge" many times,[7] that the action of *Paradise Lost* is touched off by the same kind of action that, in a revenge tragedy, often initiates the chain of events: some irrational and wilful decision of an absolute monarch, in this case God's announcement of the exaltation of the Son.[8] Most obviously, the action of *Paradise Lost* is controlled by the plot that drives the poem into motion: Satan's effort to colonize the newly created Earth in revenge for the defeat he has suffered in Heaven. The question must soon be faced, of course, whether Milton, as Gardner put it, was "creating the last great tragic figure in our literature and destroying the unity of his poem in so doing."[9]

Thus defined, the plot of *Paradise Lost* was what Milton was constructing from the time when he first conceived the idea of a tragedy, at some point in the late 1630s according to the jottings in the Trinity manuscript, until the first edition was published in 1667.[10] This is the version of the poem's *mythos* that has it begin in Hell, so that Heaven appears as a parody of what the reader has already seen; that has the War in Heaven precede the Creation, so that the Creation appears to be God's reaction to the depopulation of Heaven; and that has Satan's success in the garden the cause of the Redemption, a structural connection whose implications many critics have tried to minimize by allusion to the doctrine of the Fortunate Fall.[11] In sum, this is a plot that makes good

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Elizabethan Tragedy," *English Studies* 1 (1948): 46–66, reprinted in idem, *A Reading of Paradise Lost* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. 99–120.

[7] 1.35, 107, 148, 170; 2.107, 330, and so forth, totalling ten times in Books 1 and 2 and twenty-one times in the poem as a whole; see O. B. Hardison, Jr., "In Medias Res," pp. 27–41. See also Richard S. Ide, "On the Uses of Elizabethan Drama: the Revaluation of Epic in *Paradise Lost*," *Milton Studies* 17, ed. James D. Simmonds (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983), pp. 121–40.

[8] Franco Moretti, "Tragic Form as the Deconsecration of Sovereignty," in idem, *Signs Taken For Wonders* (London: Verso, 1983), pp. 42–82. See chap. 5.2, above.

[9] Gardner, "Milton's Satan," p. 120. She had changed her mind about this by the time she reprinted the essay in her book (see n. 6, above), adding a note to say that "the strength of Milton's design holds together the cosmic and the human theme" (ibid). This change of mind corresponds, I think, to Milton's, as my argument will suggest.

[10] See Fowler (1998), pp. 1–5, or Flannagan (RM, p. 311).

[11] The locus classicus is Arthur O. Lovejoy, "Milton and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall," *English Literary History* 4 (1937): 161–79. See note 25, below.

and evil balanced opponents, and that shows God's goodness as required by Satan's badness.

The second edition changes this revenge tragedy more clearly into a classical epic. Yet since the shift of the second edition involved little more than renumbering the books of the poem, it is clear that the second plot emphasized by this new division was already present in the first edition. Milton's tinkering with the poem's external structure served merely to draw out in an explicit way what was already written into *1667*, the secret and usually silent plot with which God and Milton had informed their creations, but one that the power and dominance accorded, by their permissive wills, to Satan, had threatened to obscure. Good emerges from evil in the divine, benign scheme of things and in Milton's imitation and justification of that scheme.

Several objections might be raised to this account of the poem's growth. The first edition, after all, is not a tragedy but an epic on the 10-book Renaissance model. Helen Gardner, indeed, pays no attention to the difference between the two editions, but argues instead that it was the decision to write an epic that loosed Satan from the chains in which a classical tragedy would have confined him. One could reply, however, that this argument appears to contradict the main point of the rest of her essay about the tragic or dramatic power of Satan. More generally, we should remember that Italian neoclassical theory had, in the course of adapting Aristotle, closely associated the tragic and epic genres, and that this had led among Milton's predecessors to several experiments in "five-act epics," from Sidney to Davenant's *Gondibert*.[12] So ten books was current epic practice, yes, but in Milton's mind the practice may still have retained a close association with his original conception of a tragedy on the Fall of Man.

A more serious objection would be that none of the plans for the tragedy preserved in the Trinity manuscript bears much resemblance to the structure of the ten-book first edition. Milton's nephew, Edward Phillips, it is true, tells us he first saw Satan's Niphates speech as the opening of a drama, perhaps during the 1650s, and this does suggest the idea of an Elizabethan revenge tragedy.[13] Yet the plans of the Trinity manuscript and Phillips's version are quite different, and, in any case, what Phillips says, always supposing it is true, itself suggests how far the epic form had modified the tragic idea, since the Niphates speech now occurs at the opening of Book 4, what in Barker's scheme would be the middle of the second act. Against this objection one could reply that Milton still kept the essential idea of a plot that opens with powerful scenes for Satan, even when the epic scope allowed him to expand Satan's role, via the narrator, and set scenes in Heaven and in Hell. Thus the

[12] See R. H. Perkinson, "The Epic in Five Acts," *Studies in Philology* 43 (1946): 465–81; and especially Hardison, "In Medias Res," p. 31.

[13] Helen Darbishire, ed., *The Early Lives of Milton* (London: Constable, 1932), pp. 13, 72–73.

tragic figure of the "lost Arch Angel" as well as the tragic five-act form persisted when "Milton changed his mind . . . and set himself a problem of extraordinary difficulty in choosing to treat this particular subject in epic form."[14]

A further objection to Barker's hypothesis was put forward by John Shawcross.[15] He claimed that he failed to see the dramatic unity of Barker's Act 4, for example, what is now Books 7, 8, and 9. He points out that the "act" was broken in two by an invocation even in *1667*. But this objection may be turned on its head. For one thing, Barker's claim is not that *1667* showed "unity" in its acts, certainly not in the fourth act, which was often in Elizabethan tragedy (like Hamlet) packed and diverse, but rather that *1667* had something about it that Milton felt obliged to change: the traces of an earlier tragic design still clung too noticeably to it. For another thing, that "invocation," unlike the three previous ones (which do introduce "acts" in Barker's scheme) is not a direct address to the Muse but rather a meditation on the mixed form of the poem: it is here that the narrator says he "now must change / Those Notes to Tragic," a "Sad task," as he calls it, "yet argument / Not less but more Heroic" than those of classical epics (9.5–6, 13–14). It is here, too, that he stresses the process of composition rather than the finished product:[16]

> If answerable style I can obtaine
> Of my Celestial Patroness, who deignes
> Her nightly visitation unimplor'd,
> And dictates to me slumbring, or inspires
> Easie my unpremeditated Verse:
> Since first this Subject for Heroic Song
> Pleasid me long choosing, and beginning late.
>
> (PL 9.20–26)

The Muse remains here "unimplor'd," in the third person, and this personal aside or digression both insists on how recently epic form and subject have come together and goes on to cite the tragic rather than epic virtues of "Patience and Heroic Martyrdom" as the proper but unsung subject of this new and unprecedented genre.[17]

[14] Gardner, "Milton's Satan," p. 119. Hardison, "In Medias Res," develops Gardner's ideas but ends by suggesting that, far from allowing Satan to escape his conscious control, Milton's difficulty was in creating a credible symbol of evil in a poem dominated by an omnipotent God. Once again, it is revealing to find different critics reacting differently to the same evidence. Hardison cites as precedents *The Jew of Malta* and *Richard III*, which both open with soliloquies for the villain.

[15] Shawcross, *With Mortal Voice*, p. 64.

[16] See the extensive discussion by Steadman, pp. 29–38. Hardison, p. 34, makes the interesting point that the dramatic action of "Adam Unparadiz'd," one of the projects for a tragedy, is focused on the material that appears in Books 9 to 12 of *Paradise Lost*.

[17] Dennis Burden, *Logical Epic*, p. 59. Burden also develops the parallels with Elizabethan tragedy along the lines proposed by Gardner.

Shawcross's own list of structural symmetries is heavily dependent on the ten-book edition, so he is obliged to argue that Milton bowed only to external pressure, the neoclassical requirements of the age of Dryden, in publishing the second edition in twelve books. Yet since he groups his symmetries in two columns, the first of which comprises the first six books, the second the last four, of *1667*, it would seem that the second edition would have been more appropriate, so that six would have been the number of books in each of his columns. And since he occasionally violates the sequence of events, whether in *1667* or *1664*, to produce his persuasive list of correspondences between the two halves of the poem, the second edition would surely have done as well as the first.

> The drawing of good out of evil is seen also in terms of drawing order out of disorder (such as God's creation of light), of harmony out of disharmony, of proportion out of disproportion. Much more is thus achieved by a metaphor of structure where the seeming disorder, disharmony, and disproportion which the ten-book version allows disappear as the full structure is recognized. But man's finite perception has frequently failed to let him see that structure.[18]

Although he disapproves, then, Shawcross's version of Milton's reason for the change agrees with Barker's, namely, that Milton wanted God's plot to emerge more clearly.

Actually Barker's explanation for the shift between the two editions implied something more interesting. It was not only a desire to emulate the 12-book *Aeneid* that he stressed, but Milton's sense of what he saw in his own creation. Although he did not say so, Barker makes his Milton sound a lot like Milton's God, at least as Empson read him. Having made his point that the twelve-book structure corrects the excessive emphasis on Satan, Barker continues:

> Milton, it is clear, was by no means unaware of what has been called "the unconscious meaning" of *Paradise Lost*. It may be that in 1667 he was not quite aware of it, or that for some reason or other he was then inclined towards it; it is certainly emphasized by his having written in ten books. But the 1674 renumbering indicates his consciousness of Satan's power over the poem, and (if it was not simply a trivial toying) the new disposition was meant to strengthen Satan's chains. Its motive was to shift the poem's emphasis and its centre in a way that would point more clearly to its stated intention.[19]

Barker's parenthetical proviso allows for the absence of external evidence to suggest why Milton made the changes, but what he implies is that Milton

[18] Shawcross, *Mortal Voice*, pp. 46; cf. 64.
[19] Barker, "Structural," p. 28.

noticed something as a *reader* of his poem of which, as its *writer*, he had not been "quite aware."

Although he does not cite Barker, Joseph Summers's argument might seem to confirm him. He made a similar point, more extensively, about the poem's center. In the twelve-book version, the center, in number of books, not lines, has shifted from the division between Books 5 and 6, the Rebellion and consequent war, to that between Books 6 and 7, the War and subsequent Creation. Thus it is no longer Abdiel who appears on each side of the central divide, the "angelic exemplum of man's ways at their most heroic," the one just man, the saving remnant, he who undergoes and, alone of the poem's angelic or human characters, resists temptation; now it is Christ who bestrides the central books, "the divine image of God's ways at their most providential."[20] So the larger activity of Christ, not just his clambering into the chariot, becomes the true center of the poem. Yet whereas Barker suggested that it was the Satanic power of which Milton became fully conscious on a second reading, Summers implies the opposite. In his view, it may have been the other plot, God's, of which Milton was not quite aware in the writing of the first edition. Summers notes something "oddly touching" about a Milton who, "in humility before his own creation," perceives afresh the structural implications, which are "larger and other than his conscious intention."

In practice it may not matter whether Satan's or the providential plot were not quite conscious as Milton wrote the first edition. One can see how important the question would be if we were arguing about the source of poetic inspiration, whether it be demonic, as Blake thought, or divine, as Milton's Muse and the classical tradition required. What matters to my argument here is that both are conceivable. As we have pursued the ideas of various critics, we have found a Milton who fully discovers one or the other side of his poem only on rereading it, who shifts the balance between them for *1674*, and who finds that his own act of writing corresponds to the major movement he inscribed within it: good emerging from evil, light from darkness. We hesitate, as he appears to have, as to which of the two structures to stress. What can we make of this?

The major changes in his perception and organization of the poem all occur in the second half and make more nearly accurate what the narrator says at the beginning of Book 7: "Half yet remaines unsung" (7.21). Three new pairs of books replace the two pairs that made up Acts Four and Five of *1667*. The first of these three pairs is the new Books 7 and 8, one long book in *1667*. The new arrangement reveals a previously buried or subordinate aspect of the poem, one that now begins to assert itself: the increasing focus on Adam and his progressive understanding. In *1674* one book is now devoted entirely to the magnificence of the Creation, and then a further book to Adam's anxious

[20] Joseph Summers, *Muses' Method*, pp. 112–13.

questions about it, the astronomical speculations, and to his allied reflections upon his feelings for Eve (she it was who first posed the questions about the stars that Raphael answers).[21] No longer only a preparation for the Fall, the dialogue with Raphael turns the otherwise mysterious and transcendent process of creation into something that has direct and decisive relevance, though problematic, to Adam's and mankind's situation. Indeed, Adam himself has something to offer to this dialogue, his own account of the birth, or rather the creation, of Eve. From this point of view, the dialogue that is Book 8 leads into Adam's assumption of the narrative duties and skills of Raphael, at least on a smaller scale, and so illustrates Raphael's hint that things on Earth and in Heaven may be "Each to other like" (5.576).

The next new pair of books has a similar structure; the old climax of the Fall becomes now the first movement of a process that is compensated by the gradual repentance of Eve and Adam in Book 10 of *1674*. In that process Adam begins to realize the significance of the Sentence passed on mankind by Christ, with its initially mysterious references to Eve's heel and serpent's head. The repentance scene may now be seen more clearly to include within it the contrast with the unrepentant Satan's triumphant return to Hell.[22] That return is no longer what it chiefly had been in *1667*, the beginning of Satan's power over Earth, his successful colonization.

The final pair, also made out of one book in the original, may now be seen to turn about a similar pivot as the previous pair, and indeed as the whole poem now does: the break between Books 11 and 12, newly established for *1674*, comes between the Flood and the Rainbow, or, as one of the new lines puts it, "Betwixt the world destroy'd and world restor'd" (12.3). Here, too, Adam gradually moves towards a deeper understanding of his role in the larger scheme, and of the meaning of that scheme. So each of the new books created out of the second part of a long book in *1667* is devoted to Adam's education by an angel.

Barker briefly proposed that other buried structures became more visible in the second edition. The new possibility of three groups of four books, for example, would allow for a triad of disobedience, woe, and restoration—but for this idea he was castigated persuasively by Shawcross, who does not find that triad where Barker points.[23] Yet such possibilities will continue to provoke new readers to find, or construct, fresh structural patterns. I would propose, for example, that two of the new books, 8 and 12, now invite alignment with Book 4. All three contain important birth narratives: Eve's in 4, Adam's and Eve's in 8, and Christ's in 12. This arrangement suggests the progress of love, a

[21] Compare 4.657, 675; 5.44 with 8.15–25, 100–106, where the idea is reiterated that the stars must shine in vain unless someone watches them. The idea forms a part of Satan's temptation of Eve.

[22] See chap. 10, above.

[23] Shawcross, *Mortal Voice*, p. 64.

preoccupation of these three books, from bliss in 4, through troubled discussion of the subject in 8, to the renewal of divine and human unity in 12; so at least Adam seems to understand the birth of Christ from his own loins and God, saying "So God with man unites" (12.382). That alignment (3x4) would not have been possible in the 5x2 *1667*.

However we define the new possibilities opened by the book divisions of *1674*, the new organization serves to reassert or restore the divine plot by which Satan's plot is contained and converted. The second edition more nearly imitates this divine plot than does the first. From the point of view emphasized by the first edition, the sequence of episodes shows his God doing what Milton appears to have done himself in the second edition; that is, reacting to the power accorded to Satan. Book 3, of course, like God's speech in Book 5, chronologically the poem's earliest event, purports to resolve this difficulty by showing that God anticipated all of the events and allowed them their place in his scheme. Yet is there really so much difference, granted an omniscient God, between reacting to an anticipated deed and picking up the pieces after it has happened, even if the new structure one makes from the pieces is better, in some sense, than the old? However we may react to or conceive of Milton's God, whether with Empson and the Romantic tradition, or with what Empson called the "illiberal approach" that dominates the Milton industry, it is clear that most of the problems the poem poses resolve themselves ultimately, as Milton saw, into the problem of God. It is the ways of God that call for justification, and Milton's chief means of doing so, since this is a poem rather than a treatise, is to imitate and so reveal in narrative structure the divine form. But what is remarkable about *Paradise Lost*, as these various discussions of its structure have, I hope, revealed, is how closely it weaves together Satan's plot and God's, and how much they come to look like each other, as the rebel and victorious angels do. As that famous passage about reading in *Areopagitica* asserts,

> Good and evill we know in the field of this World grow up together almost inseparably; and the knowledge of good is so involv'd and interwoven with the knowledge of evill, and in so many cunning resemblances hardly to be discern'd, that those confused seeds which were imposed on Psyche as an incessant labour to cull out, and sort asunder, were not more intermixt.[24]

Milton applied the same doctrine to the reader of *Paradise Lost* as he applied to all potential readers in *Areopagitica*. The changes between the two editions show him likewise engaged in this process of difficult discernment.

The new break that introduces Book 12 coincides with another shift in the poem's manner, the moment when Michael ceases to be a Prospero-like pro-

[24] *Areopagitica* (PM p. 287; YP 2.514).

ducer of a magic-lantern show and becomes simply a narrator. "Henceforth what is to com I will relate, / Thou therefore give due audience, and attend" (12.11–12), he explains, and so echoes the Miltonic narrator, who also hoped that he would "fit audience find, though few" (7.31). Michael's reason for the change, he says, is that "I perceave / Thy mortal sight to faile" (12.8–9), and he thus picks up a central aspect of the blind narrator's language, he who spoke of "things invisible to mortal sight" (3.55). Michael's words thus link Adam with Milton as well as with the poem's reader. And the second edition increased the structural responsibilities that this tiring Adam must bear. Adam proves a good reader (or listener), if a little overenthusiastic. He still gets things wrong and has to be chastened by Michael. When he hears about the birth of Christ, for example, he reacts by seeing the structural implications, looking both backwards and forwards at once: "O Prophet of glad tidings, finisher / Of utmost hope!" (12.375–76). He claims that he now understands the meaning of the obscure Promise of Book 10 that the seed of woman shall bruise the serpent's head. So far so good, but immediately Adam goes wrong again: "say where and when / Thir fight, what stroke shall bruise the Victors heel" (12.384–85). He reacts like the father of a prize-fighter whose son has just been offered his big chance, and he wants tickets for the fight. Indeed, he has just said that Christ will proceed from his loins. Michael is obliged to explain the inward nature of the battle: "Dream not of thir fight / As of a Duel" (12.386–87). In this and similar passages, Adam becomes a figure for the reader's efforts to construct an accurate version of the poem's—and God's—plan.

Learning from this chastening, Adam greets the final paradox of the poem's history with an ambivalent response. His final discovery in the poem is a crucial event, in every sense, for the interpretation of its structure. Since Lovejoy's essay, this moment has been called the discovery of the *felix culpa* (Fortunate Fall)—the Redemption or Atonement story, which makes the Fall fortunate. Michael ends his explanation by pointing to the Last Judgment, and saying that the Redeemer will

> receave them into bliss,
> Whether in Heav'n or Earth, for then the Earth
> Shall all be Paradise, far happier place
> Then this of *Eden*, and far happier daies.
>
> (PL 12.462–65)

This apparent key to the poem's meaning Adam greets at first with wonder:

> O goodness infinite, goodness immense!
> That all this good of evil shall produce,
> And evil turn to good; more wonderful

> Then that which by creation first brought forth
> Light out of darkness!
>
> (PL 12.469–73)

Lovejoy pointed out that it was a major innovation of Milton's to have Adam perceive the doctrine himself, but he did not point out that Adam's first reaction is essentially a structural one: Adam is piecing together the poem's meanings, and he here links the Redemption to the process that Milton had made the center of the second edition: the emergence of light from darkness, the Creation that follows the War in Heaven. Lovejoy went on to show that Adam's next reaction, doubt, was also a Miltonic innovation, but again I suggest Milton's originality goes further. The word "doubt" retains, I think, its Latin meaning of "hesitation" alongside its psychological and religious meanings. What Adam hesitates between are two reactions to the poem's informing structures. As we first hear his lines, they suggest the dominant plot of the poem, or at least the active and obvious one, the Satanic plot that Milton tried to contain in *1674*:

> full of doubt I stand
> Whether I should repent me now of sin
> By mee done and occasiond, or rejoyce . . .
>
> (PL 12.473–75)

The line end at "rejoyce" makes us think (until we follow the enjambement on to hear the relatively innocuous sequel) that the Satanic plot of the poem is the one that succeeds in more than the sense in which Eve and Adam were induced to eat the apple. All the intervening lines, the Son's Judgment, the bitter recriminations, Michael's teaching, have all led towards the same rejoicing as Satan's on his return to Hell. Adam, as we first hear him, doubts not only whether he should repent, sufficiently disturbing if one follows the logic of the thought, but whether he should not rejoice at what he has done. Just as Satan does. Just as Romantic or humanist readers have done.

The rest of the speech, however, soon absorbs or converts that threat, just as the larger plot does, and as Paul does when he asks his Roman correspondents (Romans 6.1–2), "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid." But things become a little more complex in Milton than in that straightforward line of Paul's. Adam is hesitating, it turns out, whether to repent or to rejoice "Much more, that much more good thereof shall spring, / To God more glory, more good will to Men / From God, and over wrauth grace shall abound" (12.476–78). What Adam might be inclined to rejoice at, then, is not what he did, but what God will do. But even there the syntax is not quite so explicit. Adam does not incline to rejoice at God's active achievement, but rather at his passive or indirect presence: "To God more glory" and "more good will to men / From God"—parallel prepositional phrases at the

beginning of succeeding lines that both put God in oblique cases. Grace, it is true, shall abound over wrath, but also "good thereof shall spring"—where the antecedent of "thereof" is Adam's sin. What Adam perceives here, then, in the complexity of his syntax and the perplexity of his mind, is not so much the active deity as the results of his plotting: or to put it another way, the compensatory, redemptive, and converting plot of the poem as Milton, in God's wake, had constructed it, and as, with his final godlike act, he had reinterpreted it, allowing the main epic plot to emerge from, and compensate for, the "dark materials" (2.916) of the dominant tragic plot he had first invented.

Several critics have argued that we do not find the doctrine of the Fortunate Fall in *Paradise Lost*, even in the hesitant and ambivalent way I have suggested here.[25] Clearly the doctrine was dangerous ground. The risk is that, if the logic of the paradox were spelled out, then the Fall is fortunate because necessary to the Redemption. Thus the Satanic plot is not merely converted but ignored, and so the whole delicate doctrinal and architectural structure of Milton's poem would collapse, leaving only a bland, if cosmic, smile, a Buddha face, in place of the awful sense of sin, the dread proximity of damnation, that Milton evokes in the figure of his lost archangel. So dangerous was the doctrine that many Christians, and Milton's contemporaries among them, denied the idea altogether, as Danielson insists in arguing for an entirely "Unfortunate Fall." It is indeed true that *Paradise Lost* provides for Adam and Eve to graduate from Paradise by a better route than the sorrowful way in which they do leave it. God says as much, for example in a speech from the heavenly throne in Book 7 (150–62). It is also probable that Milton included such passages, as Dennis Burden argued, because he was

> worried about the idea of the Fortunate Fall. It is one thing to say that Adam is, as a result of the Atonement, better off than he was in Paradise, but something altogether different to suggest that he is better off than he would have been if he had stayed obedient. God's mercy cannot be allowed to make nonsense of his justice.[26]

[25] Lovejoy's argument, in "Paradox," has been challenged by Virginia R. Mollenkott, "Milton's Rejection of the Fortunate Fall," *Milton Quarterly* 6 (1972): 1–5, by John C. Ulreich, Jr., "A Paradise Within: The Fortunate Fall in *Paradise Lost*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 32 (1971): 351–66, and by Danielson, *Milton's Good God*, pp. 202–33. In his essay, "The Fall and Milton's Theodicy," *The Cambridge Companion*, pp. 144–59, Danielson repeats his argument against the Fortunate Fall doctrine with a tendentious quotation from God: "Happier, had it suffic'd [man] to have known / Good by it self, and Evil not at all"; 11.88–89. No one who defends the *felix culpa* principle could possibly deny that.

[26] Burden, *Logical Epic*, p. 37. The dangers of the doctrine are amply illustrated by the citations in Lovejoy's essay, by the material gathered by Danielson, and by the argument of A. D. Nuttall, *Openings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 92–93, repeated in his *The Alternative Trinity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 121, for what he calls "the naturalist *felix culpa* . . . Adam and Eve are instantly promoted, by authentic moral knowledge, to an arena of strenuous virtue. . . . The notions of a Fall and of true moral felicity . . . are intertwined." Nuttall's argument largely restates, without acknowledgement, what Millicent Bell had written in "The Fallacy of the Fall in

That is well said, but, equally, it is one thing to argue, with Burden, that Milton was worried about the Fortunate Fall, and something quite different to argue, with Danielson, that he therefore scrupulously avoided it. As we saw when we analyzed that tricky word "therefore" in Book 3—the one that suggests Satan has to be damned in order for man to be redeemed, the *felix culpa* doctrine is displaced from man's fall onto Satan's—Milton was not in the habit simply of avoiding dangerous issues, and this one goes to the heart of his project to justify the ways of God to men.

That Milton did not oversimplify the problem is evident, I think, not only in the lines about Adam's doubt that Lovejoy used to demonstrate his point, and that I have been analyzing somewhat differently, but also in the following quotation from earlier in the poem:

> From this descent
> Celestial vertues rising, will appear
> More glorious and more dread then from no fall.
>
> (PL 2.14–16)

This is as clear a version as one could wish, much clearer than Adam's hesitant response, of the doctrine of the Fortunate Fall. The words, however, are Satan's, part of the speech in which he encourages the troops at the opening of the great consult. The sentence does not end with the last line of my quotation, but continues: "And trust themselves to fear no second fate." We are thus required to reassess the meaning of "vertues" in line 15: it is not only the abstract term, but the title of a rank of angels, and this literal meaning may be all that Satan has in mind. One of the many ironies of the poem is that this apparently straightforward version of the doctrine that informs it should be given to Satan, only for us to discover he doesn't understand it.

So the doctrine of the Fortunate Fall is present in the poem, but ever threatening to become a Satanic parody of itself. Any interpretation of the poem's structure and meaning is always likely to turn into its opposite: even the informing structural principle exemplified by the Fortunate Fall, that good emerges from evil, is heralded and balanced by Satan's defiant anticipation of it

> If then his Providence
> Out of our evil seek to bring forth good,
> Our labour must be to pervert that end,
> And out of good still to find means of evil.
>
> (PL 1.162–65)[27]

Paradise Lost," *PMLA* 68 (1953): 863–83. In spite of the various objections, however, the assumption continues in Milton criticism that the paradox explains the poem: see, for example, Steadman, *Epic and Tragic*, p. 30.

[27] J. R. Watson, "Divine Providence and the Structure of *Paradise Lost*," *Essays in Criticism* 14 (1964): 148–55, cites this among other examples of the symmetry that the poem now shows about its central point between Books 6 and 7, and also suggests that it was Milton's perception of this

And the principle is set at risk by his later heroic cry, "Evil be thou my Good" (4.110). Both points of view, then, the Satanic and the divine, are required by, and woven together in, the overall plot of the poem. As the state of man now is, it is necessary they be intermixed since it is the Miltonic reader's task to distinguish them. Adapting Milton's words in *Areopagitica*, we might say that Satan's plot is necessary in order that, however dimly, we may see God's.

Just how much Milton made them look like each other, how difficult they are, even for Milton, to sort, may be seen if we return, finally, to our first and apparently trivial illustration of the change between the two editions. Even as he shifted the major center of his poem to Christ's activity across Books 6 and 7, Milton dethroned the ascendant Christ from the numerological center and replaced him with a line that suits better the landscape of Hell: "Of smoak and bickering flame, and sparkles dire" (6.766). The odd word "bickering", still current for describing a candle flame, is glossed by Fowler as "darting, flashing," but this is the earliest use of the word in that sense: all other such uses, defined as poetic by the *OED*, are allusions to that line of Milton's. The *OED*'s basic meaning for the word is frequentative, akin to, but stronger than, its modern English sense: quarrel, skirmish, battle. It was Milton who extended and altered this sense by aligning it with the word "flame" and thus producing the alliterative suggestion of "flickering." In their context the words are attached to Christ's rather than Satan's warlike rage. But whether consciously or by inadvertence Milton has made the poem's central words feel Satanic even as they are absorbed into the larger activity of Christ that now commands the poem's middle books. The balance is different, but only slightly, and these minor shifts, between Satanic and divine foci and between first and second editions, show how close and necessary to each other are the poem's two informing structures. Adam and Milton, the first two readers of *Paradise Lost*, both hesitate between the two plots in the process of reconstructing the structure of this text. To stand, but full of doubt, seems to be the necessary, even salutary, position of the Miltonic reader.

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symmetry that caused him to renumber the later books. Fowler summarizes such ideas in 1998, p. 26. The approach is reminiscent of Cedric Whitman's to the *Iliad*, in *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), who discovers "geometric design" and what he calls "pedimental structure" as informing devices. William H. Marshall, however, in "*Paradise Lost*: Felix Culpa and the Problem of Structure," *Modern Language Notes* 76 (1961): 15–20, finds that the didactic and dramatic elements of the poem clash, so that the conclusion "involves repudiation rather than subordination, of what we have felt during the first nine and a half books." But if Marshall had seen that there is no "explicit assertion in the final books of the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall," as he puts it, but only the hesitant Adam's perplexity about it, he might have seen how the delicate balance is maintained by these symmetries, and even reinforced in the second edition.

Conclusion: Signs Portentous

These Blazeing Starrs!
Threaten the World with Famine, Plague, & Warrs:
To Princes, Death; to Kingdoms, many Crosses.
—du bartas, quoted on the title page of john gadbury, *De Cometis* (1665)

1. *Apocalypse*

When the comet Hale-Bopp made its graceful way across our skies in 1998, most informed people were impressed by its beauty and curious about the science. But a few people were driven by religious fanatics to various tragic episodes of mass-suicide. They read the comet as a message, which they interpreted in the conventional way as a sign of the Apocalypse. The contrast between these two kinds of reaction to astronomical phenomena is discernible already in the seventeenth century. But the proportions would have been quite different: a majority would have taken the religious view, even some members of the Royal Society for the Advancement of Science. The religious, indeed occult, views of men like Kepler and Newton are surprising for many moderns, but were not nearly so unusual in their time. One of the greatest intellectual advances in human history has been the gradual separation of science from religion, but arguably it was only the Darwinian revolution of the nineteenth century that completed this process. Even then the stubborn resistance of conservative forces within the Church had at least one unfortunate side-effect (quite apart from the nonsenses of modern American fundamentalism). Catastrophism, a respectable but minority view among scientists, has continued to receive a bad press from its quondam association with apocalyptic thinking.[1] And most scientists regard themselves as "uniformitarians," countenancing catastrophes only on such vast time-scales that anything like the K–T event, a collision with an asteroid that most now agree led to the extinction of the dinosaurs, is very unlikely to happen within our time, even within recorded history. I do not agree. Indeed, I am a neocatastrophist. But I know from experience how hard it is to persuade intelligent people that this is not some kooky religious sect.

In the seventeenth century, various views of astronomical phenomena were competing for dominance. All men probably regarded celestial events as signs that needed to be read, but how? Intellectuals like Joseph Mede (b. 1564), who lectured at Milton's Cambridge college, Christ's, took a grave view of comets.

[1] For the science of catastrophism, see Victor Clube and Bill Napier, *Cosmic Winter* (New York: Universe Books, 1990), and Richard Huggett, *Catastrophism: Asteroids, Comets and Other Dynamic Events in Earth History* (London: Verso Books, 1998).

His popular book on biblical prophecies, *Clavis Apocalyptica* (1627), which was translated, by order of the Long Parliament in 1643, as *The Key of the Revelation*, borrowed from Rabbinical sources to show a "synchronism of prophecies." Others challenged such millenarian views, especially those in the Calvinist tradition within the Anglican and Presbyterian churches. According to Thomas Hall (1653), millenarians placed "too much weight on . . . Jewish Targums and Talmuds, Sybilline Oracles, the Koran, and astronomy".[2]

These political differences were exacerbated by the Civil War and soon compounded by rapid scientific developments. There were several important astronomical phenomena during the period of Milton's active life. A spectacular comet in 1618 had already produced much anxious speculation, but also at least one effort at a serious description. And in 1664–65 there were two comets, the second of which was again spectacular. They were associated in the minds of many with the plague and fire of the following years (as Defoe recorded in his *Journal of the Plague Year 1665*, published in 1722).[3] The association precipitated comet treatises that are among the most lavish ever published.[4] Newton and Halley had both observed these phenomena, and the comet of 1680, the first to be discovered by telescope, would soon impel both to gather data and make more accurate calculations (Kepler had thought that comets travelled in straight lines).

Paradise Lost straddles the two worldviews.[5] Uriel slides down on a sunbeam, but he comes swift as a "shooting starr" of the kind that in autumn

[2] A. R. Dallison, "Contemporary Criticism of Millenarianism" in Peter Toon, ed., *Puritans, the Millennium and the future of Israel: Puritan eschatology, 1600 to 1660: a collection of essays* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1970), p. 104. See also Robert G. Clouse, "The Rebirth of Millenarianism," in the same collection, p. 55. The Qur'an had just appeared in English in 1649.

[3] Defoe's persona hesitates between the two worldviews:

> I saw both these stars, and, I must confess, had so much of the common notion of such things in my head, that I was apt to look upon them as the forerunners and warnings of God's judgements; and especially when, after the plague had followed the first, I yet saw another of the like kind, I could not but say God had not yet sufficiently scourged the city. But I could not at the same time carry these things to the height that others did, knowing, too, that natural causes are assigned by the astronomers for such things, and that their motions and even their revolutions are calculated, or pretended to be calculated, so that they cannot be so perfectly called the forerunners or foretellers, much less the procurers, of such events as pestilence, war, fire, and the like. (chap. 2)

[4] Roberta J. M. Olson and Jay M. Pasachoff, *Fire in the Sky* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 20, thus refer to two books: John Gadbury's *De Cometis*, published by Chapman in 1665, the subtitle of which promises that "they are philosophically, historically, and astrologically considered"; and to the continental scientist Johannes Helvelius's *Cometographia* of 1668, who worked out that comets travel in a curved trajectory round the sun.

[5] In the same way Milton's historiography is also divided between "representing his nation's troubled past mythopoetically and representing its truth impartially—'as lean as a plain Journal' (YP 5.230)", without any imaginative adornment; David Loewenstein, *Milton and the Drama of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 4. The apocalyptic visions alternate with weary patterns of repetition and decline.

"shews the Mariner / From what point of his Compass to beware / Impetuous winds" (4.558–60). This comment is not true to modern scientific understanding; indeed, it echoes a simile for Athena in Homer (*Iliad* 4.75–79), but it indicates a recognition of the regularity of certain astronomical events, such as the meteor showers of July or November, and a strong practical bent, a wish to read and be guided by the heavens. Unlike Homer's, Milton's mariners have a compass. Nonetheless Stevie Davies is right to comment on the contemporary difficulties of travel: "momentary glimpses into the turbulent atmosphere are all the voyager can hope for in order to plot his course safely on the surface of a world in which he is never fully at home."[6] Angelic visitant on a sunbeam is the older worldview; the shooting star points toward the modern and invites us to recall the inconclusiveness of Uriel's mission, to "beware impetuous winds."

Thus omens like texts need to be read. Sometimes the reading is simple enough. It had been so on one famous occasion that authorized all the others, the moment in the biblical Apocalypse when Heaven itself accompanied the dramatic sign with a warning voice. The strength of Milton's feelings about this, and his own consequent urge to intervene in history and in his own narrative, can be gauged by the extraordinary moment when the narrator wishes himself to be that voice:

> O for that warning voice, which he who saw
> Th' *Apocalyps*, heard cry in Heaven aloud,
> Then when the Dragon, put to second rout,
> Came furious down to be reveng'd on men,
> *Wo to the inhabitants on Earth*! that now,
> While time was, our first Parents had bin warnd
> The coming of thir secret foe.
>
> (PL 4.1–7)

The language is different, but the urge is exactly that which children feel when hearing or seeing a tale enacted: "Look behind you!" But all such heavenly signs are not so clear, nor indeed, as the frustrated passion of the passage shows, can we wield such prophetic power. The winds are impetuous.

A review of the cosmic phenomena of *Paradise Lost* will allow us to come to a conclusion of the argument of this book. For whether the approach is traditional or modern, the primary point of reference, as in this instance, is usually Satan. His shield is the occasion for a simile about Galileo's telescope, an image of the new astronomy, near the beginning of the poem (1.288). And Milton refers quite often to unusual and uncertain events in the skies, and connects them with Satan, witches, or even the full combat myth. When Satan, for example, confronts his offspring, Death, a simile tells us Satan

[6] Davies, *Milton*, p. 123.

like a Comet burn'd,
That fires the length of *Ophiucus* huge
In th' Artick Sky, and from his horrid hair
Shakes Pestilence and Warr.

(PL 2.708–11)

Milton thus places this figure of Satan in the northern sky, extending the more general biblical link between Satan and "The Quarters of the North" (5.689), and appropriately enough within the constellation Ophiucus, the Serpent-Bearer. Milton also exploits the Greek etymology of *komētēs*, which means "long-haired." And this comet's hair shakes out two of the horsemen of the Apocalypse, Pestilence and War. The astronomy is exact, and so is the biblical allusion.

Comets have long been associated with serpents, if only because of their tails. But Milton refers here to an event of his own time, the appearance of that brilliant comet in Ophiucus in 1618, presaging, so it was thought at the time, the Thirty Years War.[7] As in this case, the interpetation offered for astronomical events was usually political. If you wanted change, you looked eagerly for signs of it in the heavens. If not, you looked fearfully.

2. *"Disastrous twilight"*

The reception of a key passage in the first book of *Paradise Lost* well illustrates the anxiety associated with the politics of astronomy, and it will indicate the potential variety of readings, some of which avoid and some of which realign or praise the implied politics of the poem. In fact this passage, an epic simile, was so controversial that it apparently made Charles II's censor consider suppressing the whole poem, an unusually strong response to a literary convention. The passage actually provides two epic similes, one brief, one *à queue longue* to describe Satan as fallen angel. It occurs soon after his revival in Hell when he begins to rally his troops. The other fallen angels respectfully observe

[7] See Fowler and Leonard ad loc, also John T. Shawcross, "The Simile of Satan as a Comet, *PL* II, 706–11", *Milton Quarterly* 6 (1972): 5. This comet (C/1618W1), accordng to Olson and Pasachoff (*Fire in the Sky*, p. 35), had a tail of "over 70 degrees and was observed splitting into numerous star-like pieces." Milton must have seen it, whereas he had gone blind by the time of the others mentioned. As Fowler shows, the reference is astronomically precise, and extended at 10.328–29. Anguis is the serpent constellation which is held by Ophiucus, the serpent-holder; its serpent body extends from Libra through Scorpio and Sagittarius. Satan enters the world in Libra at 3.555–60. For stars as rebels in the combat myth, see Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, pp. 131–40, 179–81, 252. These myths have sometimes been read as records of ancient catastrophes. Milton's use of astronomical phenomena is discussed in Kester Svendsen, *Milton and Science* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), pp. 66–75, and for a complete listing, see Sherry Lutz Zivley, "Satan in Orbit: *PL* IX 48–86," *Milton Quarterly* 31 (1997): 136.

Thir dread commander: he above the rest
In shape and gesture proudly eminent
Stood like a Towr; his form had yet not lost
All her Original brightness, nor appear'd
Less then Arch Angel ruind, and th' excess
Of Glory obscur'd: As when the Sun new ris'n
Looks through the Horizontal misty Air
Shorn of his Beams, or from behind the Moon
In dim Eclips disastrous twilight sheds
On half the Nations, and with fear of change
Perplexes Monarchs. Dark'n'd so, yet shon
Above them all th' Arch Angel.

(PL 1.589–600)

The long epic simile is characteristically Miltonic in that it contains the little word "or," which is to say that it provides a choice as to how we are to imagine the central figure of Satan as sun, either in the early morning mist or when eclipsed by the moon.

The political significance of this image was soon perceived. John Toland (1670–1722), an early biographer of Milton, commented: "I must not forget that we had like to be eternally depriv'd of this Treasure by the Ignorance or Malice of the Licenser; who among other frivolous Exceptions would needs suppress the whole Poem for imaginary Treason in the[se] . . . lines" (1.594–99).[8] This is the only reference (and thus the source of all the subsequent allusions) to this problem with Thomas Tomkyns, the official Censor, but we have no reason to believe it is not true. For Tomkyns, the text was manifestly subversive. And Toland knew quite well that Milton had advocated and defended the execution of Charles I before the scandalized and frightened disapproval of all the crowned heads of Europe: indeed "imaginary Treason" means to contemplate in "imagination" the assassination of the king.[9] And both Tomkyns and Toland probably also knew that there had been an eclipse on the day of Charles II's birth, 29 May 1630. Royalists tried to acclaim the event as a good omen (for example, Dryden in *Astraea Redux* 288–91), but Milton's nephew Edward Phillips remembered it as a portent of the Commonwealth Interregnum.[10]

[8] Helen Darbishire, ed., *Early Lives*, p. x. Toland is studied in William Kolbrener, *Milton's Warring Angels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[9] A full discussion is in John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide, 1793–1796* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[10] See John Leonard ad loc. He refers to *Chronicle of the Kings of England* (1665), p. 498. He also quotes Edward Chamberlayne, *Anglia Notitiae* (1669), p. 127: "the Sun suffered an Eclipse, a sad presage as some then divined, that this Prince's Power should for some time be eclipsed, as it hath been." Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution*, comments that "this idea followed naturally from the doctrine of Hermeticists and others: if the sun was the source of life and

Thomas Newton (1704–82), editor of an important eighteenth-century edition (1749), still recorded the alleged politics of the quoted part, but wavered in his own allegiance: "It is said that this whole noble poem was in danger of being suppressed by the Licenser on account of this simile, as if it contained some latent treason in it [. . .], but it is saying little more than poets have said under the most absolute monarchies, as Vergil *Georgics* I.464." It was common by then to link Milton and Vergil, but Newton's proposed parallel provides a very significant allusion. Turning Milton into the Christian Vergil did not necessarily suppress the politics. The Vergilian passage first insists on the power of the sun to give accurate signs:

> sol tibi signa dabit. solem quis dicere falsum
> audeat? ille etiam caecos instare tumultus
> saepe monet fraudemque et operta tumescere bella

It then launches on a long description of the unnatural events that accompanied the assassination of Julius Caesar, beginning:

> ille etiam exstincto miseratus Caesare Romam,
> cum caput obscura nitidum ferrugine texit
> impiaque aeternam timuerunt saecula noctem.[11]

The extended description refers to animal omens, beasts talking, wolves howling, ghosts in the streets at twilight, volcanoes erupting and other celestial portents, including an awful voice. It was picked up and modified by Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 15.783–98), and by Shakespeare in both *Julius Caesar* 1.3.5–28 and 2.2.14–24, and *Hamlet* 1.1.113–21.[12]

So Milton is alluding to one of the most significant of all historical acts of rebellion and, more especially, the murder of a tyrant. On this reading, the censor was right to be worried about the implications of the passage, and Newton wrong to minimize them by referring to Vergil. The Vergilian original brings out even more clearly that the sun does provide omens to be read by those who observe it: in Milton, however, the written sign offers its reader no clarity, only fear, and what is more, it perplexes. Both poets connect the

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energy, its eclipse naturally boded ill" (p. 405). Milton had written in *The Reason of Church Government,* 1641, (YP 1.585), "Let the astrologer be dismayed at the portentous blaze of comets and impressions on the air, as foretelling troubles and changes to states," and Hill points out that the bark in "Lycidas" had been built in "th' eclipse, and rigged with curses dark."

[11] Vergil, *Georgics* 1.464–68: [T]he sun will give you signs. Who dare say the sun is false? He it is who often warns that dark rebellions are threatening, and that treachery and secret wars are on the increase. He it was who had pity on Rome when Caesar's light was put out, and hid his glory in dusky gloom and an impious age feared everlasting night (My translation).

[12] Milton may have had the *Hamlet* passage in mind here also, since it refers to "Disasters in the sun" (line 121): both Shakespeare and Milton would have been aware of the etymology, *dis–astrum* = unfavourable aspect of a star.

natural sign with political events, but Milton's, perhaps in deference to the censor, is briefer and more allusive—and more ambiguous.

Henry J. Todd (1764–1845) in his splendid variorum edition (1801), no longer referred to the story of the censor or to the Vergilian allusion. He was writing soon after the French Revolution, at a time when England led the conservative forces of Europe against the revolutionaries. Instead he says "we may refer . . . the simile of Milton to a very fine one of somewhat the same kind in Shakespeare," and quotes *Richard II*, 3.3.62–67:

> See, see King Richard doth himself appear
> As doth the blushing, discontented sun
> From out the fiery portal of the east,
> When he perceives the envious clouds are bent
> To dim his glory and to stain the track
> Of his bright passage to the occident.

At first it would seem that the immediate political impact of the text has been buried and, through the substitution of the Shakespeare parallel for that of Vergil, it has been nationalized. Milton the dissenter has been subtly co-opted into the unified idea of English culture. That may well have been the intention, as the language of aesthetic appreciation ("a very fine one . . . in Shakespeare") implies, yet if one follows up the allusion, we find that political rebellion, and of a highly threatening sort, still hangs about the annotation. King Richard II was, of course, overthrown by Bolingbroke the usurper. A special performance of the play was put on by Shakespeare's company on the eve of the Essex rebellion in 1601: although the players were subsequently cleared of any complicity, Shakespeare's patron, the Earl of Southampton, was briefly imprisoned. We know that Queen Elizabeth I understood the implications and identified with Richard; and the deposition scene of the play was not printed until 1608. Nonetheless Todd's Shakespeare parallel now carries no sense that either writer was interested in contemporary politics.

Aesthetic rather than political comparison with Shakespeare was soon a staple of Romantic readings of Milton,[13] and Hazlitt explored the comparison with *Richard II* further in the third of his series of *Lectures on the English Poets*, entitled "On Shakespeare and Milton" (1818)—from which I quoted at the end of chapter 1. The passage is part of an extensive argument about the difference between drama and epic.

> The objects of dramatic poetry affect us by sympathy, by their nearness to ourselves, as they take us by surprise or force us upon action, . . . the objects of epic poetry affect us through the medium of the imagination, by magnitude and distance, by their permanence and universality. The one fills us with terror and pity, the other with admiration and delight.

[13] See the discussion by Lucy Newlyn, *Romantic Reader*, p. 59.

This contrast between dramatic and epic or heroic poetry had been a staple of eighteenth-century criticism, and its terms go back to Aristotle. Yet, Hazlitt goes on that, though the two genres are quite different in theory, in practice they approximate and strengthen one another, at least in their "perfection" (i.e., Shakespeare and Milton):

> When Richard II calls for the looking-glass to contemplate his faded majesty in it, and bursts into that affecting exclamation: "O that I were a mockery-king of snow, to melt away before the sun of Bolingbroke," we have here the utmost force of human passion, combined with the ideas of fallen splendour and regal power. When Milton says of Satan: "His form had not yet lost," etc, the mixture of beauty, of grandeur, and pathos, from the sense of irreparable loss, of never-ending, unavailing regret, is perfect.

And indeed these lines about Satan as the eclipse were frequently quoted by the Romantics as instances of the Miltonic sublime, whether the writers were themselves conservative or progressive.[14] Burke had found them confused and obscure, fitting his idea of the sublime, Wordsworth said that when he read these lines "he felt a certain faintness come over his mind from the sense of beauty and grandeur," while Hazlitt reporting the comment saw "no extravagance in it but the utmost truth of feeling." The comparison of the two great national poets no longer makes any explicit reference to the politics of the image, only to its "sublimity." The canonization of Milton, especially of *Paradise Lost*, has led to the tacit suppression of the links with Milton's revolutionary prose.

Sir Samuel Egerton Brydges (1762–1837), editor of a popular Victorian edition of Milton (1835), made no reference at all outside the text, merely emoting that: "Few poetical passages can be finer than this, or more beautifully expressed. The precision with which the image is delineated is incomparable." Thus the text has been completely aestheticized and any political meaning suppressed. This was the period when the idea of English literature was beginning to emerge as a separate and authentic subject of study, suitable as a substitute for Classics in the formation of young and vulnerable minds.

This series of comments on the passage gives the impression that the text was gradually shorn, like the sun of its beams, of subversiveness and so became acceptable to wider and wider circles of middle-class readers. This may indeed be so.[15] Many readers have preferred to bury Milton's politics under talk of his

[14] Joseph Wittreich, *Romantics*, p. 151.

[15] Katsushiro Engetsu, "Monarchy and Patriarchy in Paradise—Milton's *Paradise Lost* Toward Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*," *Studies in English Literature: English Number 1993* (Tokyo: The English Literary Society of Japan) pp. 15–31.

sublimity, his organ music, or his blindness.[16] But we should beware of too rigid and linear a sense of how history develops. Suppression of politically subversive ideas may be part of the long process of domestication or emasculation of literary texts to suit the drawing room, and then the classroom, but some important exceptions stand out.

One early reader, Thomas Yalden (1698), shows plainly the two sides of the divided response:

> These sacred lines with wonder we peruse,
> And praise the flights of a seraphic muse,
> Till thy seditious prose provokes our rage,
> And soils the beauties of thy brightest page.[17]

This separation of poem and politics was a common way of dealing with the problem, and Yalden gives each equal time. In a debate over the poem's politics in the pages of the *London Chronicle* (1763–64), as we saw in the Introduction, both sides used Satan as a spokesman for the opposition. From the Tories, we hear that Milton must have changed his political views by the time he wrote the poem: "How could he better refute the good old cause he was such a partisan of and such an advocate for than by making the rebellion in the poem resemble it, and giving the same characteristics to the apostate angels as were applicable to his rebel brethren?" The other side, the Whigs, made an opposite but parallel argument: "The Tory plan, where man assumes a right of dominion over man, was nearer related to Satan's aim of setting himself up over his peers."[18] And indeed this Whig or progressive view of Milton as incorruptible statesman-poet played a certain role in both the American and French Revolutions: Thomas Jefferson frequently quoted Milton in his commonplace-books, and Mirabeau's translation of *Areopagitica* went through four editions from 1788 to 1792.[19] William Godwin praised "the great energies" of the archetypal revolutionary, Satan, energies that flow from "a powerful sense of fitness and justice," and William Blake's famous description of Milton as "of the Devils party"[20] used a phrase that was occasionally used at the same period

[16] Bernard Sharratt, "The Appropriation of Milton," in *Essays and Studies*, ed. Suheil Bushrei, Vol. 35 (1982), remarks that, conceivably, by 1654, Milton "saw himself as having fulfilled his task of writing a national epic, precisely his authorship of his *Defensio*" (p. 39). He shows that the change in ideological atmosphere during the eighteenth century "made theological explanations and vindications of political events seem increasingly redundant." See generally Sharpe and Zwicker, *Politics of Discourse*, especially the essay by Michael McKeon and Zwicker.

[17] Quoted by Tony Davies in his Introduction to *John Milton: Selected Shorter Poems and Prose* (London: Routledge English Texts, 1988), p. 14.

[18] Both cited in Disalvo, *War of Titans*, pp. 29–36.

[19] George Sensabaugh, *That Great Whig Milton* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1952).

[20] See Introduction, above, John Shawcross, *Milton: the Critical Heritage 1702–1801*, pp. 372–73, and Joseph Wittreich, *Romantics*, p. 35.

to refer to republicans. Other eighteenth-century writers also saw Milton's politics in their own perspective. Dr. Johnson's views (1779) are well known: he put Satan and Milton together, so that Milton was an "acrimonious and surly republican," fired by envy, "sullen desire of independence," and "pride disdainful of superiority." The politics of the poem were obvious to many readers, and usually, as in the eclipse passage, associated with interpreting Satan.

This was especially true among the Romantics, who tended to appropriate Satan as a republican hero. Indeed, Hazlitt, who suppresses the politics of the image when thinking of the comparison with Shakespeare, still insists, later in the same *Lecture III*, on the link of Satan's politics and Milton's.[21] And among the most perceptive comments on our passage is one by Keats. In his copy of *Paradise Lost*, which he was reading again and annotating in 1818, perhaps because of Hazlitt's lectures, he made the following comment:

> How noble and collected an indignation against Kings—"and for fear of change perplexes monarches, &." His very wishing should have had power to pull that feeble animal Charles from his bloody throne. "The evil days" had come to him—he hit the new System of things a mighty mental blow.[22]

The politics of the passage is no secret to Keats, who glories in its antimonarchist leanings. Indeed, he makes it far more direct and explicit than any other reader: had Milton himself been so explicit, the censor would have had no choice but to cut or suppress.

3. *Editors*

In the annotations of modern editors, we find a similar disagreement about the politics, and so about the meaning of the simile. No one mentions Vergil as a subtext at this point. Hughes (1957) is the only one to retain the possible allusion to Shakespeare; indeed, he leads with this and only then mentions that the "censor is said to have objected to these lines as a veiled threat to the king." He also suggests, rather too eagerly, that the simile foreshadows Satan's final defeat, just as another eclipse, the one in 11.182–84 adumbrates the effect of man's sin on the world:

> Nature first gave Signs, imprest
> On Bird, Beast, Aire, Aire suddenly eclips'd
> After short blush of Morn.

Fowler (1968, 1998) also refers to this passage, and adds the lines (11.203–7) in which Adam interprets these "Signs" as a bad omen. Adam's natural assump-

[21] See the passage cited in chap. 1.17, above. Hazlitt, who remained a radical, would not have wanted to be neutral in 1818, a volatile time and the year before the Peterloo massacre.

[22] Wittreich, *Romantics*, p. 556. The "evil dayes" quotation is from PL 7.25–26.

tion, though he has not been told this at all, is that such signs are to be interpreted, not just admired (I begin the quotation at line 193):

> O *Eve*, some furder change awaits us nigh,
> Which Heav'n by these mute signs in Nature shews
> Forerunners of his purpose, or to warn
> Us haply too secure of our discharge
> From penaltie, because from death releast
> Some days; . . .
> . . . . . .
> Why else this double object in our sight
> Of flight pursu'd in th' Air and ore the ground
> One way the self-same hour? why in the East
> Darkness ere Dayes mid-course, and Morning light
> More orient in yon Western Cloud that draws
> O're the blew Firmament a radiant white,
> And slow descends, with somthing heav'nly fraught.
>
> (PL 11.193–207)

The contrasting morning light is the sign of the advancing band of angels accompanying Michael on his mission to announce the dark future to Adam. The angels are going to drive Adam and Eve out of Paradise at the end. Adam here senses their importance ("with somthing heav'nly fraught").

Both Hughes and Fowler see this later eclipse as solar, and they may be right even though the language could apply merely to a sudden change of weather. But Fowler sees it differently from Hughes. It is one of the signs perceived by Adam and Eve, and therefore *read* by them. These are not merely signs of the blight beginning to fall on nature, already peceptible to Adam in the previous Book, as Hughes implies, but specifically ill omens. We may think of these eclipses as a kind of writing by God or "Heav'n" within the text: in the first case the readers were monarchs, here they are Adam and Eve. There is, however, a vital difference not noted by any of the editors, and to which I shall return. The eclipse in Book 1 is in a simile, but now, in the final books of the poem, the adverse signs are in the narrative.[23]

Fowler also sees the parallel with Book 1 rather differently from Hughes.

[23] Nature had, to Adam's mind, been giving him positive signs before the Fall; for example, 8.511–14: when Adam tells Raphael how he led Eve to the nuptial bower, "blushing like the Morn," Heaven and Earth respond to the blushing morn inside the simile with their own reactions outside it: "all Heav'n, / And happie Constellations on that houre / Shed thir selectest influence; the Earth / Gave sign of gratulation, and each Hill;"—these marvellous lines continue until the "amorous Bird of Night" bids the evening star haste "to light the bridal Lamp" (8.520). Before the Fall the world is full of such signs and exchanges between simile and narrative. On the relation of Eve's blush to the morn's (and Raphael's), see Lucy Newlyn, *Romantic Reader*, pp. 77–78.

The "disastrous twilight" eclipse of Book 1 Fowler reads not as adumbrating Satan's defeat but as

> ironically double edged; for the ominous solar eclipse presages not only disaster for creation, but also the doom of the Godlike ruler for whom the sun was a traditional symbol. (Thus Charles II's Licenser for the Press is said by Toland to have regarded these lines as politically subversive.)

Not Satan, then, but all creation is threatened by the omen: for Fowler the eclipse is a sign of Satan's power, and of his ultimate success. This is an important and characteristic difference from Hughes. And perhaps since Fowler was writing in the 1960s, the political reading reasserts itself, not simply as something reported by Toland but as actively at work in the image—note the force of Fowler's "thus" to open his parenthesis. The censor, or Licenser, was a good reader, after all. Hence the simile has to be "ironically double edged": the sun represents not only doomed creation, but also monarchy.[24]

Yet there are, it would seem, ironies within ironies in the passage, since if Milton was indeed allowing this second meaning of the simile, the eclipse of monarchy, to glimmer behind the main meaning, he let it stand even when the hated monarchy had been restored. The complexity of the simile has now become such that the monarch who reads himself into the omen has every reason to be perplexed. The simile now points in at least two different directions at once, towards monarchy (doomed, restored, or still doomed?) and towards nature. In the same way, Satan is both magnified and diminished by the comparison between his shield and the moon's "spotty Globe" seen through that "*Tuscan* Artist" Galileo's telescope (1.284–91).

Perhaps we have here a case of the dilemma theorists call "undecidability." Similes are normally read by aligning their contents with what lies outside them in the text, yet here, as often, that alignment is not clear and depends on how far beyond the simile one is willing to go. One could sort Fowler's two putative references for the simile on a time-scale: the doom of nature points to the Fall itself, soon to be achieved by Satan's impact on mankind, whereas the end of monarchy points both to Milton's time and to a more successful revolution at some point in the future, or at the end of time. Yet both meanings are present together, like Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit,[25] and render the image uncertain; at the very least, an alert reader must pause, reflect, distance himself, ponder the meaning yet again of this disturbing Satan figure, and find his own

[24] Fowler's second edition unfortunately drops most of this discussion. Joan Bennett, *Reviving Liberty*, pp. 36–39, sees Satan as based on Charles I, who like most European monarchs regarded himself as the sun.

[25] See *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 194. This is the best known of several such images in Gestalt thinking; the vase that is at once two faces in profile is widely referred to, as well. Each image has two different interpretations, only one of which can be seen at any one moment. The idea is well used by Lucy Newlyn, *Romantic Reader*, pp. 66–68.

way. And what gives the image its full value is that Fowler has restored the impact of the politics to the text.

4. *Sun-Son*

And what then if we add the pun on sun-Son? The rise of the Son means the eclipse of Satan-sun, this Satan who had wanted to be the favored Son. That is indeed the chronological starting point, an explicitly political one as we saw, of Milton's poem. Something like this is Flannagan's (1993) important contribution to the reading of the simile.[26] Like the sun, he writes, the tower in the earlier simile was a common symbol for Christ, and so both tower and sun point to Satan's nobility "even though he is a ruined archangel and an eclipsed sun (the fallen morning star)." Thus Satan is, once again, both magnified and diminished by the simile.

The burden of the simile becomes even more complex, if we recall that Satan begins his Niphates speech by addressing the sun with hatred (4.37). Obviously the relationship between Satan and sun is not exhausted by the first explicit reference to it in the eclipse simile, and it does not remain static, or even stable. Yet it is worth noting that, when Satan begins the address to the sun, the time is noon, so the sun is high, and this is expressed by relating sun and tower again. Furthermore, the point of Satan's jealousy is that the sun reminds him of the glory he lost, just as in the eclipse simile:

> Sometimes towards *Eden* which now in his view
> Lay pleasant, his grievd looks he fixes sad,
> Sometimes towards Heav'n and the full-blazing Sun,
> Which now sat high in his Meridian Towre:
> Then much revolving, thus in sighs began.
> O thou that with surpassing Glory crownd,
> Look'st from thy sole Dominion like the God
> Of this new World; at whose sight all the Starrs
> Hide thir diminisht heads; to thee I call,
> But with no friendly voice, and add thy name
> O Sun, to tell thee how I hate thy beams
> That bring to my remembrance from what state
> I fell, how glorious once above thy Spheare.
>
> (PL 4.27–39)

It is the discrepancy between sun and Satan, especially in present and past glory, that evokes this speech, more clearly than in the simile. In Satan's hatred,[27]

[26] Roy Flannagan, ed., *Paradise Lost* (New York: Macmillan, 1993). In the later version of his text, for *The Riverside Milton*, Flannagan unaccountably drops this interpretation, and even has no reference to the censor, or indeed any note at all on the passage.

[27] For hatred in the poem, see chaps. 1.1, 4.1, and 6.1, and for God's hatred, chap. 6.12, above.

we can read the plot of the poem—Satan's desire to replace the sun as the god of this new world—and so, too, as the Son.

The relation of sun to Son is clearly complex, but only once we see it against the backdrop of Milton's own combative politics and his distaste for monarchy. The restitution of the politics to Milton's poem by modern editors and commentators enriches the text and so poses the reader the kind of typical problem he must be willing to deal with at each point in his contact with Satan. The figure of Satan-as-sun is hard to decipher, as is often the case with the complex simile of epic tradition, and that difficulty is made explicit in our passage: the omen written in the sky is said to perplex. In the ancient world, men, as Vico put it, believed "that Jove commanded by signs, that such signs were real words, and that nature was the language of Jove."[28] But these celestial auspices were opaque: they may have been the first of all languages, but they meant Jove hid himself at a distance. And now, too, practice of the science known as "divination" may not produce knowledge, only perplexity.[29]

In Leonard's Penguin edition, we finally come full circle: not only does he cite the story of Charles II's censor, but adds that he had good reason so to react. He then explains about the eclipse that marked the birth of Charles, and also comments on the two different readings, one the Royalist (it was a good sign), the other the more widespread sense that it was, as we now say, ominous. The uncertainty that dogs interpretation of Milton's simile he thus finds reproduced in contemporary readings of an actual eclipse.

5. *Reading Signs*

What, then, does the rest of the poem tell us about how to read such heavenly signs? The apparent ability of Lapland witches to induce eclipses of the laboring moon (2.665–66) may well be thought to complicate our sense of how to read these Miltonic omens. And again the critics disagree. John Steadman thinks Milton was sceptical about witches,[30] but Kester Svendsen leaves open the possibility that Milton himself believed in the witches' power, and so had stayed in the prerationalist camp. The text is inconclusive, but does not sound as if it is designed to be treated sceptically. Lucan's *Pharsalia* 6.499–506 and 554–58, one of Milton's principal points of reference throughout the poem, describes witches who drink infant blood and cause lunar eclipses, just like these, and what is more they are also associated with omens of disaster. Of

[28] *New Science* §379, quoted in Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 5.

[29] The word "perplex" has a stronger meaning in the poem than mere puzzlement, since it also describes the relations of gods to heroes: "*Neptun*'s ire or *Juno*'s, that so long / Perplex'd the Greek and *Cytherea*'s Son" (9.18–19). This is closer to the *OED* 1b meaning of "torment, trouble, vex, plague." For such a perplexing, "fear of change" would be an apt reaction.

[30] John M. Steadman, "Eve's Dream," p. 166. See also chap. 4.6, above.

course, a solar eclipse is different from a lunar, but nonetheless if one can be induced by a witch, that does not bode well for the decoder.

Another heavenly phenomenon may be relevant to this problem of how the poem presents the reading of omens. God hangs out his golden scales in heaven (i.e., the constellation of Libra, "Betwixt *Astrea* and the *Scorpion* signe"; 4.998) to prevent the horrid fray of Satan and Gabriel's troops that might have torn the "Starrie Cope / Of Heav'n" (4.992–93), or at least mixed up all the elements, "disturbd and torne / With violence of this conflict" (4.994–95). In the classical sources, Homer's Zeus (*Iliad* 8.68–77) balances the fate of Achaeans and Trojans, or Hector and Achilles (22.208–13), and the loser's pan drops. Here, though, a biblical sign intervenes, and the image goes the other way: at Daniel 5.27, the writing on the wall tells Belshazzar "Thou art weighed in the balances and art found wanting." The result of this overlapping of allusions is a wonderful muddle of meanings. Gabriel exults and tells Satan to read his lot "in yon celestial Sign," that he is indeed weighed and found light. Satan does look up, "and knew / His mounted scale aloft: nor more; but fled / Murmuring" (4.1011–15)—but it is not clear Satan sees the same meaning as Gabriel. If he reads it via Homer (and Vergil), the sign will predict his victory. So therefore he flees the battle to win the war. But the text has also told us what God meant by the sign: he was weighing the question of an immediate fight against their parting now, and it was this one (the latter) that quick flew up and kicked the beam. But in view of the biblical complication, does that mean the parting wins or loses? So Gabriel and Satan are both only partly correct at best. No wonder the "careful Plowman," who has appeared just before in the text (4.983), "doubting stands." Both images, of threshing and of the scales, were frequently connected with the Last Judgment, as the commentators, especially the wonderfully comprehensive Fowler, point out. It is doubly odd, then, that the event, and the image, are so inconclusive. Even those within the poem, unfallen creatures like Gabriel, are not up to reading the heavenly writing.

The moment, however, is crucial. Whatever God may have meant, Gabriel, whom God has appointed guardian of the Garden, thinks he is absolved of responsibility. The angelic police force is thus elaborately redundant. And it is now Milton's incomprehensible God who, having, as Carey puts it, examined the prisoner and determined he is a homicidal maniac, lets him go at once.[31] But the effect is in any case Earth-shaking even if not quite at this moment, as Milton's version of the Fall story extends it to the whole of nature. Perhaps that is what God had in mind when he hung out his sign, but it doesn't seem to be what Gabriel means when he invites Satan to read it. In this case, then, it is not that the sign can be read, like the eclipse simile, according to two different time-schemes, but that it is not obviously readable at all.

[31] John Carey, *Milton*, p. 82.

6. *"Good with bad expect to hear"*

In the final books of the poem, though, mysteries like these are dispelled and the relation of heavenly signs to earthly events is clarified. The potentially disturbing language of the combat myth is gradually (but only just) tamed. Thus "those colourd streaks in Heavn" (11.879) following the Deluge are easily explained by Michael as God's covenant, the first example of many in which Adam learns to read the sky. The most famous of all such signs is the "Starr / Unseen before in Heav'n" that proclaims the birth of Christ and "guides the Eastern Sages" (12.360–62). When Michael tells this part of the story, the narrator reverts to his most Shakespearean language to give Adam's reaction. "He ceas'd, discerning *Adam* with such joy / Surcharg'd, as had like grief bin dew'd in tears, / Without the vent of words" (12.372–74). The intensity of emotion is signalled by the similarity of joy to grief. The words to which Adam now gives vent are those with which, we have seen, in delighted exclamation he expects a duel and bruises. Michael has to explain that the combat is meant to be understood morally and spiritually, not literally.

Not that Milton makes the distinction easy to grasp. Throughout the last two books he reiterates the language of the combat myth that informs the poem (and indeed Milton's whole view of history),[32] and each time reminds his reader that a particular biblical event is accompanied by a sign. The "lawless Tyrant," the Pharaoh who is Moses' enemy, is "compelld by Signes and Judgments" until a "Palpable darkness" overshadows all his bounds and "blot[s] out three dayes" (12.173–88). Typological echoes are obvious enough (here the three days of the War and of the Resurrection sequence), as in all these rapidly summarized biblical episodes. The end of this one is that the "River-dragon" (12.191) is tamed, and while the Sea swallows Pharaoh and his Host, it lets the Israelites pass.[33] And these events had already been mentioned in Book 1, the Pharaoh's "*Memphian* Chivalry" and the sedge on the Red Sea (1.304–11), and the cloud of locusts hanging "ore the Realm of impious *Pharaoh*" (1.342).

Paradise Lost can be folded over on itself to produce many such meaningful pairings, and they promise a satisfying sense of an approaching end.[34] But those Book 1 images were parts of similes for the fallen angels, and were not, as

[32] David Loewenstein, *Drama*, pp. 18–19, sees Milton's depiction of history in terms of pride and rebellion, and an ongoing conflict between "th' unjust" and "the just."

[33] For the parallels of River and Sea, Nahar and Yamm, and Joshua and Moses, see Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, pp. 46–48 and 93–98. See also chap. 2, above. Milton had used such typologically significant events to refer to his own times in *Of Reformation*: militant martyrs shake "the *Powers of Darknesse*, and scorn the fiery rage of the old red Dragon" (YP 1.525); see Loewenstein, *Drama*, p. 111. Cf. PL 3.256, "the powers of darkness," and 4.3–9, the dragon as Satan.

[34] Compare 1.165 and 12.471, where Satan's turning of good to evil is reversed by God's plan. On these structural echoes, see Fowler 1998, p. 26, and chap. 12, above.

here, accompanied by celestial signs. Indeed, this is an important difference between the language of Books 1 and 12: similes abound in the first two books, accommodating cosmic or angelic forms to earthly understanding, whereas Michael's discourse has none.[35] Celestial signs are not now remote and hard to decipher: they have slipped out of the similes and stud the narrative. Cosmic and human levels of action are linked now by these accumulating signs in Heaven.

An Angel next goes before the people as "By day a Cloud, by night a Pillar of Fire" (12.203). The giving of the Law in Sinai is accompanied by divine thunder and lightning signifying "by types / And shadows, of that destind Seed to bruise / The Serpent" (12.232–34). For Joshua "the Sun shall in mid Heav'n stand still", and "thou Moon in the vale of *Aialon*" (12.265–66), till Israel overcome: all this elaborate signing occurs in the midst of an apologetic *précis* of the events recounted by the Old Testament historians. As usual now, the symbolic combat language is insistent in Milton's summary:

> *Joshua* whom the Gentiles *Jesus* call,
> His Name and Office bearing, who shall quell
> The adversarie Serpent, and bring back
> Through the worlds wilderness long wanderd man
> Safe to eternal Paradise of rest.
>
> (P 12.310–14)

And so this resonant typological parallel prepares for the most important event of all, the birth signalled by that "Starr / Unseen before."

For the Crucifixion, the event that myteriously marks the triumph episode of the combat, Milton uses not the submissive language of the Gospels, but that of the Pauline Epistle to the Colossians with its symbolic nails: Christ himself was nailed to the cross, but by this event, it turns out by some theological miracle, "to the Cross he nailes thy Enemies." Milton understands by this that "The Law that is against thee, and the sins / Of all mankinde, with him [are] there crucifi'd" (12.413–17). And come "the third dawning light," we are told, "the Starres of Morn shall see him rise / Out of his grave, fresh as the dawning light, / Thy ransom paid" (12.421–24). He then goes on to fulfill the *protevangelium* prophecy of Genesis 3.15, to

> bruise the head of *Satan*, crush his strength
> Defeating Sin and Death, his two maine armes,
> And fix farr deeper in his head thir stings
> Then temporal death shall bruise the Victors heel.
>
> (PL 12.430–33)

[35] McMahon, *Two Poets*, pp. 17–18. The parallels and resulting balance in the poem are extraordinary, but McMahon does well also to emphasize the shift (p. 20).

All these celestial events mark important stages in the sequence of history, but perhaps the most important is this last, in that the Son finally takes on all of Satan's attributes, but in a transposed key: Lucifer, morning star and bringer of dawn in Isaiah 14, is now the Christ—and Milton gives the image that rare but remarkable emphasis that comes from repetition of the "dawning light" within three lines (12.421, 423). So through the symbolic structure of heavenly signs, no longer in simile, the combat myth is finally resolved into this neat Christian parable.

Almost. Fortunately for those of us who do not like clipped and trite endings, this is not the end that *Paradise Lost* offers. Instead comes a gloomy passage filled with all the terrible pressure of Milton's grim involvement in the frustrating history of his own time,[36] a passage that announces in memorably alliterative phrasing: "so shall the World goe on, / To good malignant, to bad men benigne, / Under her own waight groaning" (12.537–39), at least until the Second Coming and the Last Judgment. Then, at last, he shall come in Clouds from Heav'n, now a materialized sign, where there is finally no distance between sign and referent, "to dissolve / *Satan* with his perverted World" (12.546–47). Adam has been told about the eventual conversion of the world, when "the Earth / Shall all be Paradise, far happier place / Then this of *Eden*" (12.463–65). This, then, should be the promised end. Now all the signs are to be clear, easy to read.

But no, the poem does not quite end with this optimistic prophecy, but with the destruction of the only world Adam and Eve have known. Indeed, they get out only just in time, rushed out by the hands of the "hastning Angel." And this climactic moment, too, is accompanied by a celestial sign:

> The brandisht Sword of God before them blaz'd
> Fierce as a Comet; which with torrid heat,
> And vapour as the *Libyan* Air adust,
> Began to parch that temperate Clime.
>
> (PL 12.633–36)

This final apocalyptic sign of the poem echoes Satan as comet in Book 2.706–11, and restores the world of those earlier similes. Like the perplexing eclipse of Book 1, it presages devastation, and is accompanied by an "Ev'ning Mist" (12.629). God's sword, even at the very end of the poem, still echoes Satan. What Adam and Eve see when they look back are those "dreadful Faces throng'd and fierie Armes" (12.644), the last celestial images of the poem, and such fearsome guards that some readers have taken them for the fallen angels

[36] Loewenstein, *Drama*, pp. 111–25, discusses brilliantly the unresolved contradictions in these passages of historical decline. He suggests that they are much stronger in their impact than the various typological references to redemption (p. 123).

come to claim what their leader earned for them before the final destruction.[37] These Cherubim, who descend "in bright array" (12.627–28), deliberately echo those "Millions of flaming swords, drawn from the thighs / Of mighty Cherubim" (1.664–65), which greet the reviving Satan's speech in Hell. The two plots of the poem, divine and Satanic, resemble each other like mirrors, or like the seeds of Psyche in *Areopagitica* "in so many cunning resemblances hardly to be discern'd." So Milton has made even the very end of the poem feel close to a Satanic triumph.

[37] Svendsen, *Milton and Science*, p. 92, says a sword-shaped comet signified war and destruction of cities. One contemporary commentator on the Genesis story thought that "By this flaming sword etc. is meant an order of evil Angels, appointed also to guard the way to the tree of life" (John Petters, *Volatiles from the History of Adam and Eve,* 1674, cited by William B. Hunter, Jr., *Modern Language Review* 44 (1949): 89–91. Hunter also cites Milton's near-contemporary Henry More, who found the angels frightening. See Flannagan (RM, nn. 193, 195, pp. 709–10) and Fowler ad loc. The "dreadful" (12.644) is presumably subjective, giving Adam and Eve's point of view, since through their guilt these angels have become unfamiliar; see Corns, *Regaining*, p. 10. This would thus be the final instance of free indirect style in the poem. John Martindale, *Milton and Transformation*, p. 134, compares "the supreme moment of terror" in Vergil's *Aenerd* 2.622, when Aeneas sees the *dirae facies* of the gods threatening the city of Troy; see Leonard ad loc.

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